the weekly Standard

THE SANE FRINGE GOP CANDIDATE
MATT LABASH

THE SUBJECTION OF ISLAMIC WOMEN

And the fecklessness of American feminism

CHRISTINA HOFF SOMMERS

Government agents in Tehran warn a woman about her clothing and hair during a crackdown to enforce the regime's dress code, April 22, 2007.

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Dealing with a Nuclear Iran

Some timely changes will help us cope with the unknown.

Rather than threaten to disrupt the Iranian nuclear program at the reprocessing stage, we should shift the terms of the debate — to the testing of a nuclear weapon. By arguing that Iranian enrichment is the equivalent of Iran's going nuclear, we give Iran status as a nuclear power without its having to produce weapons. Although the critical scientific threshold in mastering nuclear technology is indeed the fuel cycle, significant scientific and engineering challenges — as well as time — are still ahead. By emphasizing enrichment so strongly, we give Iran a false sense of achievement that very much serves its purposes, but not ours. Our policy should be to deny Iran the prestige of becoming a nuclear power unless it also incurs the costs of overt violation of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty. Peaceful nuclear power may include mastery of the fuel cycle — but it does not produce nuclear weapons tests. We would not have to make a complicated technical case about the nuclear threshold; if they test, the Iranians would be making our case.

—Kori Schake

Why We Disagree about Foreign Policy

Different perspectives yield different conclusions.

Politics works against the recognition of the role of perspective. Each side insists that the facts speak for themselves when those facts favor its interpretation. Lee Hamilton, a respected former Democratic congressman and cochair of the 9/11 Commission, is an example. Appearing at a September 11, 2006, press conference with his Republican cochair of the 9/11 Commission, Thomas Kean, Hamilton said: "Facts are not Republican, and they're not Democratic. They're not ideological. Facts are facts." But, revealingly, he made at comment to rebuke his Republican cochair; they were having a dispute about the facts in an ABC docudrama "The Path to 9/11." Facts may not be Republican or Democratic, but they have to be interpreted by Republicans and Democrats. Hamilton said what we all say when we want to claim the facts for our point of view. We say the facts are a slam dunk. But they never are.

—Henry R. Nau

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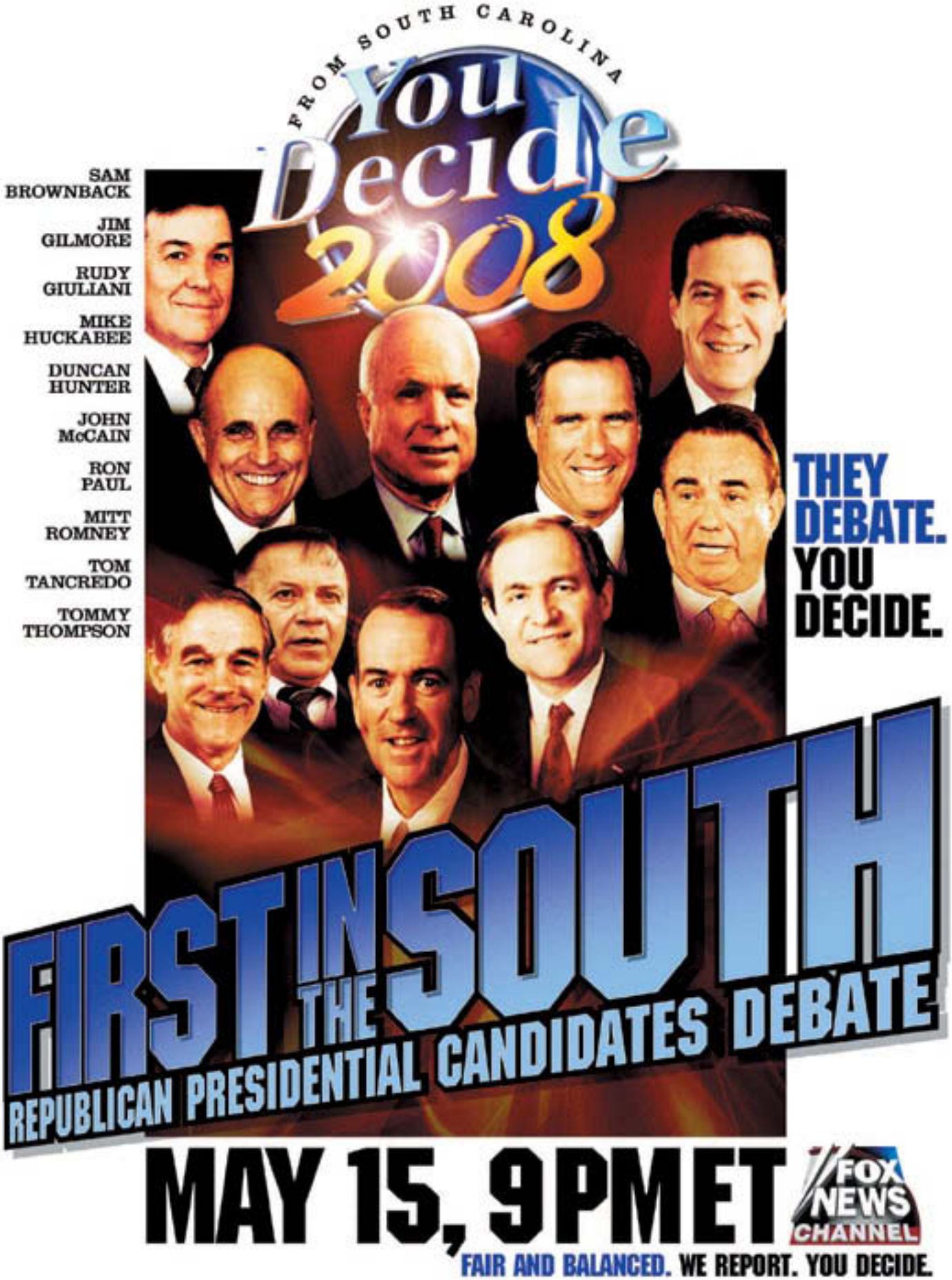

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Mansfield Speaks!

The Scrapbook's favorite Harvard professor (and no, that's not damning with faint praise—we need both hands to count the Harvard profs we respect!) delivered the 36th annual Jefferson Lecture last week here in Washington. We refer of course to this magazine's valued contributor Harvey Mansfield. The host National Endowment for the Humanities calls the lecture "the highest honor the federal government bestows for distinguished intellectual and public achievement in the humanities." If you were not lucky enough to be in the audience, you can read the text online at *www.neh.gov/whoweare/Mansfield/HMlecture.html*.

In "How to Understand Politics: What the Humanities Can Say to Science," Mansfield shows with wit and verve how our seemingly apolitical science has blinded us to the quintessentially political quality of spiritedness, which, with a bow to Plato and Aristotle, he calls *thumos*. Rather than shamefully simplify Mansfield's elegant analysis, The Scrapbook urges you to read it for yourself. To whet your appetite, here is Mansfield's bracing conclusion:

> My profession [political science] needs to open its eyes and admit to its curriculum the help of literature and history. It should be unafraid to risk considering what is ignored by science and may lack the approval of science. The humanities too, whose professors often suffer from a faint heart, need to recover their faith in what is individual and their courage to defend it. *Thumos* is not merely theoretical. To learn of it will improve your life as well as your thinking. It is up to you to improve your life by behaving as if it were important, but let me provide a summary of the things that you will know better after reflecting on the nature of *thumos*: the contrast between anger and gain; the insistence on victory; the function of protectiveness; the stubbornness of partisanship; the role of assertiveness; the ever-presence of one's own; the task of religion; the result of individuality; the ambition of greatness. Altogether *thumos* is one basis for a human science aware of the body but not bound to it, a science with soul and taught by poetry well interpreted.

Speaking of interpretation: To begin to understand Mansfield's overall oeuvre, we recommend Mark Blitz's essay in the current issue (May/June) of *Humanities* (*www.neh.gov/whoweare/Mansfield/HMappreciation.html*). Blitz captures the good fortune of those Harvard students who have had the privilege of studying with Mansfield over the past 45 years, and provides a clear account of Mansfield's breathtaking scholarly achievement.

In The Scrapbook's humble opinion, it's rare for a scholar to write something that is both good and original on a single great thinker. What's striking about Mansfield is that he's written such studies on at least half a dozen—including Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Burke, and Tocqueville—to say nothing of illuminating in fundamental ways concepts ranging from executive power to manliness. It really may be that Mansfield is both our greatest living scholar of political philosophy and our greatest living political philosopher. It is only a slight black mark on his résumé that he's also a Red Sox fan. ♦

Wrong for 95 Years

The Scrapbook admits it: Sometimes things just fall into our lap, or across our desk, that we couldn't possibly invent. A case in point is this week's announcement that publisher Andre Schiffrin, founder of the New Press, will be celebrating "oral historian" Studs Terkel's 95th birthday on Wednesday, May 16, with a series of fun-filled suggestions on his corporate website (*www.thenewpress.com/studsbirthday*).

The literary life just doesn't get any better than this. Admirers of Studs are encouraged to gather in independent bookstores (no chains, please), credit cards in hand, and let the good times roll. You can hear what famous intellectuals think of Studs ("An American treasure"—Cornel West), order free Studs Terkel posters, mix Studs's recipe for gin martinis, listen to Studs's favorite music ("Potato Head Blues"—Louis Armstrong), order a pair of Studs-style red socks ($4.99 plus shipping), and add your voice to celebrity tributes ("Still fighting the good fight"—Victor Navasky).

Best of all, the New Press has chartered a skywriter to fly over Chicago, Studs's adopted hometown, during lunch hour with this message: "Happy 95th B-Day Studs Terkel."

Now, The Scrapbook enjoys a good party as much as anyone, especially at an independent bookstore, and we like "Potato Head Blues," too. But does a bilious radio DJ who turns a tape recorder on and off, and hires somebody to type up the transcripts, qualify as a "historian," even an "oral" historian? And while we're impressed by Studs's longevity, and love skywriting, it's worth pointing out that 74 of those 95 years were spent extolling the virtues of the Soviet Union, in print and on the air, at the expense of Studs's native country.

No wonder Studs Terkel has won the George Polk Career Award—named in honor of another media icon whose fraudulent past was exposed in the pages of this magazine. ♦

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(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of July 1, 1996)

Coming Around?

Whatever its flaws, George Tenet's new book seems to be prompting a modest rethinking of the connection between Iraq and al Qaeda. A stark example last week was this comment from the *Washington Post*'s lefty military analyst William Arkin, a harsh critic of the Iraq war who remains skeptical of much of the intelligence the Bush administration used to justify removing Saddam Hussein:

> Tenet's explanation of the workings of the U.S. government and the "intelligence" on Iraq's connection to terrorism provides the most compelling argument yet as to why we should be sympathetic to the decisions of President Bush and Vice President Cheney regarding Iraq. . . . Tenet reveals a string of verified intelligence reports showing a suspicious and potentially frightening connection between Baghdad and various terrorist operatives:
>
> • "There were, over a decade, a number of possible high-level contacts between Iraq and al-Qa'ida, through high-level and third-party intermediaries."
>
> • Iraq, Sudan and Osama bin Laden may have cooperated on chemical weapons during the mid-1990s.
>
> • "There were solid reports from senior al-Qa'ida members that raised concerns about al-Qa'ida's enduring interest in acquiring chemical and biological expertise from Iraq." . . .
>
> • In the spring and summer of 2002, "more than a dozen al-Qa'ida-affiliated extremists converged on Baghdad."
>
> • At least one "senior" Zarqawi operative "maintained some sort of liaison relationship with the Iraqis."
>
> • "Credible information" indicated that an Islamic Jihad leader in Iraq was "willing to strike U.S., Israeli, and Egyptian targets sometime in the future."

Concludes Arkin: "That's just the credible and validating reporting that Tenet describes from 9/11 through the Iraq war."

Arkin is not the only person to see it this way. Here's GOP presidential not-quite-candidate Fred Thompson in his regular ABC Radio commentary:

> On the issue of al Qaeda's relationship with Iraq, for example, Tenet said that the CIA had proof of al Qaeda contact with Saddam's regime; that the regime had provided safe haven for al Qaeda operatives and that Saddam had provided training assistance for al Qaeda terrorists. He went on to say that the CIA had no proof that the relationship was operational or that they had any ongoing working relationship—that it could have been that each side was just using the other. Maybe my recollection is faulty on this, but that doesn't seem to be inconsistent with what folks in the administration said. In other words, there was clearly contact and a relationship, but no one knew exactly what it meant.

Thompson is right. And the risk posed by that relationship was plainly one reason Iraq was—and remains—a central front in the war on terror. ♦

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Casual

Death Benefits

Sentimental, depressive, ghoulish, call it what you like, I happen to enjoy, every few months, a quiet half hour or so at the cemetery. My cemetery of choice is called Westlawn, where my parents are buried. Westlawn is in the dullish suburb of Norridge, northwest of Chicago, on Montrose Avenue, just up from Ridgewood High School, home of the Rebels. My guess is that there are very few Jews in Norridge, apart from the couple of thousand deceased ones buried in Westlawn.

In his late forties, my father bought six grave plots here, certain he would die in Chicago, which he did. Most people in my parents' generation tended to buy burial plots earlier in life. Today, my guess is, most people don't bother, assuming that they will die somewhere more charming than where they are at the moment: in Venice, or New Hampshire, or Thessalonica. My father planned on dying in Chicago, a city he knew and loved and in which he prospered. I feel the same, and have no desire to lie alongside either Balzac or Jim Morrison at Pére-Lachaise in Paris.

My parents are buried in a section of Westlawn called Carnation; there is also a Daisy and a Poppy and a number of other sections named after flowers. To get to it I have to drive through the equivalent of perhaps three city blocks, which gives me a chance to contemplate the now lost first names on so many of the graves: the Lesters and Esters, Idas and Irvings, Sylvias and Sidneys. The impatience of officials at Ellis Island altered lots of Eastern European Jewish surnames, so that on these graves one finds Siskins and Seeskins and Salkins, Feldmans and Felsteins and Fesensteins, Zisooks and Zilbersteins and Zweibs.

Passing these names, I think of the joke about a laundry in Chinatown called Moishe Pipik's, which sparks the curiosity of a Jewish gent passing by. He pops inside and asks a Chinese man at the desk if he might speak to Mr. Pipik. "I Moishe Pipik," the Chinese man says. "May I ask how you come by so odd a name?" "Not know exactly," the man says.

Darren Gygi

"At Ellis Island, I stand in line behind man named Moishe Pipik. When my turn come, man ask my name, I say 'Sam Ting.'"

I usually arrive at the cemetery near noon. Sometimes a funeral will be in progress nearby; occasionally a new grave is being dug. Often, in the middle distance, Mexican women are planting flowers on graves. I rarely see fellow mourners, but then I don't really think of myself as a mourner as I stand over the graves of my parents, both of whom had long and good lives.

I don't attempt to stage conversations with my dead parents. I go to the cemetery chiefly to refresh my memory of them, recalling how good they were to me; and not in any of the showy or psychologically tender-hearted ways of the current day. They gave me freedom, left me on my own; the only thing they kept me tethered to was reality. They were the least highfalutin, the least pretentious, the least airy-fairy people imaginable. And they laughed a lot. I appear at their graveside to express my gratitude to them for these gifts.

Being surrounded by so many dead can lend perspective. I sometimes obtain clarity unavailable to me elsewhere in the presence of these graves: remind myself of how convoluted my thinking is on certain subjects, of the mistaken detours I have allowed myself to travel, of my insignificance generally. Freud said that it is better to be an ancestor than to have ancestors. But the older I get, the more I indulge in something suspiciously like ancestor worship, at any rate in regard to my parents.

I don't stay more than thirty or so minutes at the cemetery. An old custom is to leave a pebble or small stone on a grave marker as evidence that you have visited. Evidence to whom, exactly? The person in the grave, I assume. I am not superstitious but not entirely above superstition, either, and so I always look for and deposit my pebble before departing. If my father saw me do this, he would laugh.

I return from these visits strangely refreshed. The cemetery itself, its grounds carefully manicured, never seems to me oppressive or dreary. The thought that my own remains will one day be here is less alarming to me standing before my parents' graves than it tends to be at a greater distance from them. That lives have strikingly different beginnings and wildly various middles, but all have the same ending has a calming effect. As I drive away from the cemetery, death, far from seeming at all remarkable, seems ordinary, part of the deal, and thereby, somehow, less frightening.

Joseph Epstein

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Send Them Packing

I wholeheartedly agree with Bill Roggio's "Al Qaeda's Pakistan Sanctuary" (April 2). Not only does our pro-Pakistan tilt fail to jibe with our overarching goal of spreading democracy worldwide, but it also ignores the fact that Pakistan is at the center of the global war on terror. Pakistan is the epicenter of the forces of Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation, which is the textbook definition of a country in need of regime change under the Bush Doctrine. Indeed, our ultimate victory in the current war may depend far more on our ability to contain Pakistan than setting up a democracy in Iraq or preventing Iran from getting a nuclear bomb.

Capt. Joshua Slomich, USAFR
Chadds Ford, Pa.

Gamely Lessons

My earliest experience of Monopoly, the game ("Men of Property," by Erin Montgomery, April 2), was joltingly disturbing, until my father's sardonic smile and the teasing laughter of other adults around our kitchen table led me to realize that his "going to jail" was merely part of a game. And what a game it was, particularly for a four-year-old like me when he learned that with a toss of the dice he could become the owner of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

During the depression of the 1930s, Monopoly helped to nurse our family and millions of others out of some otherwise gloomy times. How much more than a game Monopoly was when it sunk into some of our less-than-middle-class minds that money could be made and a bit of happiness achieved by adhering to some of the game's life rules. Monopoly helped to teach me that prudential decisions, involving a little bit of gambling on the future, can lead to a life of security—a valuable lesson that I hope our children are still learning today.

John Hilferty
Moretown, Vt.

A Gory Situation

Regarding Duncan Currie's "Al Gore's Fevered Imagination"

(April 2): What was Al Gore thinking when he called on the 535 members of Congress to fight global warming like the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae? The 300, of course, though they put up a valiant effort, were vanquished.

Reginald Dale
Washington, D.C.

Al Gore has given me great expectations. With property here on the Alabama coast selling for $30,000 per waterfront foot, even a 10-foot rise in sea levels will put me right on Mobile Bay, where my solitary acre will be worth some $6,000,000. I can have a wharf and everything!

Winston Groom
Point Clear, Ala.

Not Funny

Regarding The Scrapbook's "A Fond Farewell" (April 9 / April 16): I have clipped cartoons depicting the foibles of our political class from various newspapers and magazines for years, and taped them to my office door. With the departure of the irreplaceable Peter Steiner from the pages of The Weekly Standard, my door, sadly, will be a lot less funny.

Mark Thompson
Washington, D.C.

Correction

Max Boot's "Can Petraeus Pull It Off?" (April 30) states that the "Night Stalkers" are an Air Force unit. They are actually the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR).

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the weekly Standard

Nothing to Fear but Polls Themselves?

The 1990s were a silly time. But that decade did produce, at its close, an impressive pair of vice presidential candidates—Dick Cheney and Joe Lieberman. Both spoke up last Thursday as the congressional debate over Iraq reached a new low.

Vice President Cheney was asked on Fox News about concerns that the Iraq war was hurting Republicans. "We didn't get elected to be popular," Cheney said. "We didn't get elected to worry just about the fate of the Republican party."

This was a just rebuke to the 11 Republican congressmen who had visited the White House the day before. They had two purposes in mind: to tell President Bush that the Iraq war was harming the GOP, and then to tell the media that they had visited the White House to convey that message. The media are primed to reward Republicans for defecting from the White House on the war. So the *Washington Post* reported on its front page Thursday that the House Republicans had spoken truth to power. They told it to the president like it is. The on-the-record star of the meeting was Rep. Tom Davis of Virginia. "People are always saying President Bush is in a bubble," Davis told the *Post*. "Well, this was our chance, and we took it."

But what chance did they take? How did they help the president deal with a crucial foreign policy challenge? Davis "presented Bush dismal polling figures to dramatize just how perilous the [Republican] party's position is, participants said." Polling figures!

These same Republican congressmen presumed—at the very same meeting—to criticize Iraqi politicians. Yet the Iraqi political class is showing a lot more courage than the American political class. They risk assassination. Our politicians risk electoral defeat. Yet it is our politicians who panic—and do so shamelessly and abjectly. And stupidly. Do the Republicans who want Bush to cut and run really think they would benefit if Iraq were to blow up, with U.S. troops helplessly standing by watching the slaughter, the full spectacle of American defeat unfolding before the American people? Here is a fine posture for a Republican to assume in 2008: I voted for the war, and then I voted for the surrender. Who in their right mind would vote for such a person?

As for the Democrats, they are in a way less abject. Most of them simply believe the war is lost, or that it should be lost, and want to throw in the towel. The day after panicked Republicans descended on the White House, almost three-fourths of the House Democrats voted to begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq within 90 days. The rest of the Democratic caucus—with a handful of exceptions—embraced a slower-bleed defeat, presumably seeking a bit more political cover.

Only one Democrat—now an "independent Democrat"—called them on their vote: Joe Lieberman. As the members of his party voted for defeat, he took to the Senate floor to plead for full funding of our troops: "Only a couple of months ago, the Senate confirmed a new commander to implement a new strategy in Iraq, General David Petraeus. That new strategy is now being implemented, and it is achieving some encouraging, if early, signs of success. . . . Yet, now many in Congress would pull the plug on this new strategy and thwart the work of our troops before they are given a fair chance to succeed. I am aware that public opinion has turned against the war in Iraq. . . . But leadership requires sometimes that we defy public opinion if that is what is necessary to do what is right for our country. . . . Al Qaeda itself has declared Iraq to be the central front of their larger war against our way of life. . . . Our judgment can be guided by the polls and we can withdraw in defeat. [But] no matter what we say, our enemy will know that America's will has been broken by the barbarity of their bloodlust—the very barbarity we declare we are fighting, but from which we would actually be running."

Joe Lieberman is of course a prophet without honor in his own party. But will poll-fearing Republicans also reject his message? The same day Cheney and Lieberman spoke, I happened to get an email from a friend. He's been very critical of the way the Bush administration has fought the war, and was pessimistic about the outcome until Bush's change of strategy in January. He's in Baghdad now, is modestly optimistic about what's happening there, and was amazed to read about the state of debate in Washington:

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"It will be a tragedy and an unforgivable crime if we abandon the Iraqis who are fighting with us. It will really be a black spot on our history far worse than Vietnam. . . . It will set back any effort to achieve positive effects in the Muslim world, and especially the Arab world. . . . A senior Iraqi officer I spoke to today told me that any Iraqi who says that America should withdraw soon is not a real Iraqi. Only the militia and the insurgents, he said, want us to leave. He is right. If we withdraw now, we will be acting at the behest of our worst enemies, snatching defeat against al Qaeda from the jaws of victory, and strengthening all of the worst actors in this region. The Iraqi people do not want us to leave. . . .

"We went through two of the worst Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad. . . . heavily infested with al Qaeda and other terrorists who terrorize the population and drive them to support or at least tolerate attacks against us. But the kids on the streets—and there were many—waved, smiled, asked for candy. The locals give us tips and ask us to get the terrorists out of the area and, above all, to protect them. We walked through a market off of Haifa Street—remember, the site of that long-running gun-battle back in January that made so much news? The market was thriving, flourishing, the local U.S. commander knew everyone and everyone knew him. The kids thronged around us, laughing, asking for candy. . . . One guy chased us all around the pool hall with a paper in his hand. He wanted to give it to General Odierno to get him a job working at the airport. Imagine a guy not only willing to be seen in public asking us to help him, but a guy willing to chase us around to do it.

"And Haifa Street is a mixed neighborhood. There were Sunnis and Shias both at the market and mixed in areas all through there. And we have not cleared Haifa Street—but we were able to drive up and down it, see people living, working, talking together, and in considerable safety. We are winning this war with the people. And they are putting their lives in our hands. . . . Our tip lines are flooded with calls from locals to tell us about bad people, even of their own sect. They are counting on us and they want to work with us and help us help them. I will never be able to see America the same way if we abandon them now. I hope and pray that our country is incapable of such an abominable act."

It is George W. Bush's historic mission to stand in the way of such a disgrace. And he can prevail. Surely this nation will not, at the end of the day, follow the path of defeat-embracing Democrats or poll-fearing Republicans.

—*William Kristol*

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Gone-zales?

There may be a good reason Bush hangs on to his attorney general. **BY TOD LINDBERG**

Alberto Gonzales

SIPA / Fabiano

Three weeks ago, when Attorney General Alberto Gonzales testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the Bush administration's firing of several U.S. attorneys and did so to bad reviews even from conservatives, most of official Washington figured he was a goner. When President Bush stepped out at the end of the day to say a good word for his embattled AG, the general reaction was that Bush had demonstrated yet again how out of touch he is.

Now, following Gonzales's May 10 appearance before the House Judiciary Committee, it looks instead like he's going to be around for the duration. It's no defense of Gonzales himself, or of the administration's handling of the firings, or even of Bush's penchant for placing longtime loyalists in positions where they find themselves in over their heads, to acknowledge that if Gonzales does indeed stay, it will be an important political victory for the administration—in that the alternative, Gonzales's departure under fire, would have been a catastrophic defeat.

Washington often gets focused on what happens next: Will Gonzales stay or will he go? But the real action is what happens after what happens next. In the case of a Gonzales departure, the president would face the extremely dodgy problem of getting a new attorney general confirmed.

Democrats with good memories, such as former Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman, who served on the House Judiciary Committee when it voted to impeach Richard Nixon in 1974, recall with precision the sequence of events that led to the resignation of the 37th president of the United States.

Richard Kleindienst was Nixon's attorney general at the time of the Watergate break-in. He resigned on April 30, 1973, the same day Nixon fired John Dean and accepted the resignations of H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. Though Kleindienst was primarily under fire for his role in handling an antitrust case, the timing of his departure inevitably made him a Watergate casualty.

And it created a job opening in an increasingly desperate time. Nixon looked to his recently installed secretary of defense, Elliot Richardson, to move over to the Justice Department. The confirmation process before the Democratic-controlled Senate Judiciary Committee was brutal. The price of confirmation for Richardson was his willingness to appoint a "special prosecutor" with a broad mandate and a grant of independence to investigate the Watergate crimes and unfolding coverup.

It took a couple weeks of battle for Richardson to satisfy Sen. James Eastland's Judiciary Committee with the selection of Archibald Cox, who had served as solicitor general in the Kennedy administration and remained close to Massachusetts's premier political family as a professor at Harvard Law School. As Nixon noted bitterly in his memoirs, "If Richardson had searched specifically for the man whom I would have least trusted to conduct so politically sensitive an investigation in an unbiased way, he could hardly have done better than choose Archibald Cox."

As David Broder wrote in the *Washington Post* at the time, "There is no way now that Richardson can spare his President from the most pitiless investigation. . . . Should the President lean on him in any way, all Richardson has to say is, 'Sir, if that is an order, I am afraid I would have no choice but to resign.'" When Nixon ordered him to fire Cox five months later, Richardson did resign.

"The rest," as Holtzman wrote in the May 1 *Los Angeles Times* reviewing those heady days, "is history." A Gonzales departure would offer Holtzman the main chance to make good on the title of her 2006 book, *The Impeachment of George W. Bush: A Practical Guide for Concerned Citizens*. She is hardly alone among Demo-

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crats in slavering over the prospect of a new "independent counsel"-style investigation of the Bush administration—one that would succeed where Patrick Fitzgerald failed by finding and charging a conspiracy and coverup all the way to the top.

It may seem hyperbolic to equate the U.S. attorney firings with the Watergate break-in. Except that it's not so much the triggering event as the stonewalling, memory lapses, contradictory testimony, missing documents, and lies under oath that constitute the real meat of a Washington scandal. Anybody who thinks an independent counsel let loose on the U.S. attorney firings could ever reach the conclusion that they were no big deal, even if they were no big deal, doesn't appreciate the logic and momentum of their own that such investigations acquire.

Sen. Patrick Leahy has already indicated that he would insist on the testimony of Karl Rove and others before he confirmed a new attorney general, but that was clearly just an opening bid. Why wouldn't he insist that a nominee recuse himself from investigating the firings and charter a special counsel to do so instead? Four weeks before Richardson took office, Nixon made it clear that the decision about appointing a special prosecutor was Richardson's alone to make. Then Richardson had to queue up an acceptable one prior to his confirmation. Could Bush put forward an attorney general nominee either under White House instruction not to appoint an independent counsel or unwilling to tell the Senate whether he would make such an appointment? Not if he expects to get past Leahy.

Holtzman was presciently skeptical about Gonzales actually leaving. She understood the risks to Bush, as did some graybeards on the other side of the aisle. Whether Bush got effective counsel about the danger of caving over Gonzales, figured it out himself, or simply lucked into it because of loyalty to an old friend, he seems to have managed to escape the greatest politico-legal peril he has faced. ♦

Puritans in Hollywood

R-rated smoking, X-rated trans-fats.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

"Astonishing," said a friend of mine—like me, a former smoker who holds only fond memories of our old habit, along with the occasional tug of nostalgic yearning. He had just seen the news last week that movies featuring characters who smoke will risk a more restrictive rating, from PG-13 to R, for example. *Now, Voyager*, the 1942 movie in which Paul Henreid lights two Camels and passes one to Bette Davis, would today earn an NC-17, along with the revulsion of the motion picture community. My friend could scarcely believe it.

But it's not astonishing at all, I said. Clearly he hadn't been reading, as I have for several years now, the "family friendly" film reviewers in the local paper and on various websites.

These tightly wound would-be critics aim to provide a unique public service, a kind of moralizing *Consumer Reports* for movies. They patrol the latest releases to warn parents away from shows that might not be suitable for the kids, and the moral universe they inhabit astonished me at first, too. It doesn't any longer.

It shows itself like this, in a review of, say, the runner-up from the Sundance Film Festival:

> . . . at last, in the tender denouement to this fable about the fragility of love, Chuck and Jim celebrate their newfound, if tragically temporary, union with a sweaty, semi-explicit tryst in a Chicago Park District men's room. Some partial nudity, and thematically a bit rough for preteens. Some of the language (repeated use of the 'f-word' during the 'water sports' sequences and when Darlene celebrates the onset of menses) may offend some parents, while tweeners and above will find their horizons expanded to encompass a world with which many may be unfamiliar. Yet this otherwise eye-opening film is seriously flawed in ways that will force most parents to think twice before making it a family film outing: Sterno is consumed to excess in one scene, and both Chuck and Jim puff cheroots without any suggestion of the dangers of tobacco smoke—to themselves and to others.

The family film reviewers are prime examples of the Church Ladies of our still-young century, purse-lipped and wrinkle-nosed, and the moral universe they inhabit is identical to that of the movie business itself—the same universe, in fact, that the moralistic trans-fat-banning Mayor Bloomberg lives in, and the plate-sniffers of the Center for Science in the Public Interest who egged him on, and the contemporary historians who find the tawdry truth of America in the genocide of the Indians and the trial of the Scottsboro Boys.

Some conservatives complain that we live in an immoral age, or an age that's at best indifferent to moral judgment. But this isn't really true. Among a very large majority of people, the need to moralize, to be censorious, to alert our neighbors to the failings of others, is undying and ineradicable—as vital as the human need for food or warmth. And the new moralizers, like the old, can't shut up.

It's certainly true, as traditionalists say, that the objects of the old censoriousness—promiscuity, divorce, abortion, infidelity—have been removed from moral categories altogether and elevated to the status of "life-

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style choices," where no one but the chooser himself is allowed to render a moral verdict (and then only on himself. And the verdict, by the way, is pretty much always "not guilty."). But keep looking. An acquaintance a few years ago urged me to read the *New York Times Magazine* Ethicist column, describing it as unintentionally comic because the writer could never bring himself to cast a strict moral judgment. "A weak-kneed relativist," is what the columnist was, my acquaintance said. So I started reading the column and was surprised to find that my friend was wrong: This columnist was moralizing to beat the band. And on Sunday morning! *Times* readers must be disgusted, I thought, until I noticed what it was he was getting moralistic about. One morning someone wrote in with the eternal yuppie dilemma: Should she buy an SUV?

"There's no way to justify endangering others just so you can play cowboy," the columnist thundered. Anyone who bought an SUV, he said, would be "driving straight to hell." And so on, week after week, I became alert to the ways in which our pop culture is shot through with moralism: sulfurous condemnations of homophobia, smoking, guns, junk food, fur, big cars, and—this is the big one—judgmentalism. The new Church Ladies simply will not tolerate intolerance.

There's hypocrisy in this new moralism, needless to say, just as there was in the old. Movie stars who complain about global warming will once in a while be caught driving their Hummer up the Pacific Coast Highway, just as preachers, back in the olden days, were occasionally found in the choir loft with the church organist. But in the new morality, as in the old, hypocrisy is merely the tribute that vice is paying to virtue. The encouraging thing is that people like Hollywood producers and even Mayor Bloomberg can still get huffy about something—even if it's something as trivial (and wonderful) as smoking. It's a start, isn't it? They can begin with smoking and SUVs and junk food, and pretty soon maybe they can work their way up to things that really matter. ♦

Battlefield Earth and Other Faves

Presidential candidates and pop culture.

BY DEAN BARNETT

It is a now deservedly forgotten moment in presidential politicking lore. With the Democratic candidates gathered for one of their countless debates on September 9, 2003, panelist Farai Chideya, purporting to represent the "Gen X crowd," posed what she called a "very personal" question. "What," she queried the assemblage, "is your favorite song?"

The least politic of the assembled politicians handled the inquiry best. The "Reverend" Al Sharpton did an inspired vamp, claiming the James Brown tune "Talking Loud, Saying Nothing" not only as his personal favorite song but also as a possible anthem for the Republican party.

The then-frontrunner, Howard Dean, did the worst. The former Vermont governor offered an answer that combined the unique Dr. Dean cocktail of belligerence, smugness, and opaqueness that his followers inexplicably equated with charm. Dean curtly told the audience his favorite song was "One you've never heard of—Wyclef Jean, 'Jaspora.'" Perhaps at that instant the Democratic party came to its senses and began the process of looking away from the unpleasant doctor and anointing as its hero John Kerry, a man who would go on to place the Green Bay Packers' legendary frozen tundra at "Lambert Field" instead of Lambeau Field.

Presidential candidates often have problems when they address the popular culture. People who run for president aren't normal. Most of them have been obsessively involved in politics for most of their adult lives.And yet presidential candidates must all compete in the "Beer Primary." This unofficial part of the election season is where the candidates vie to be the guy (or gal) the voters would most like to have a beer with.

The popular culture gives a candidate the chance to show off his regular guy bona fides. The problem is, the candidates aren't regular guys. Even if they wanted to be, their chosen life paths leave little room for regular guy pursuits. In a recent conversation with Mitt Romney, I asked the former Massachusetts governor what kind of working hours running for president demanded. "7:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M., six days a week," Romney responded. Even if our candidates had been counting down the days until *Spider-Man 3* finally hit the cinemas, they still wouldn't have time to feast on the third Spidey installment's wondrous mixture of amazing special effects and turgid dialogue.

Of course, it was Romney who most recently stepped gingerly into the pop-culture minefield. When asked what his favorite novel was a couple of weeks ago, a surprised Romney offered up L. Ron Hubbard's sci-fi epic, *Battlefield Earth*. Unmoved by the fact that *Battlefield Earth* has won such diverse sci-fi community decorations as a Saturn Award, Italy's prestigious Tetradramma d'Oro, and even France's Gutenberg Award (don't worry—I don't actually know what any of those things are either), America's wiseacre commentariat gleefully seized upon the fact that the Mormon candidate for president had chosen as his favorite novel a work written by Scientology's founder. Within a few days of hastily citing *Battlefield Earth* as his favorite, Romney downgraded it to a guilty pleasure and offered the far safer and more acceptable *Huckleberry Finn* as his all-time favorite.

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Perhaps Romney could have handled the favorite novel "issue" in a smoother fashion. Nevertheless, Romney still stands out as a politician who actually reads books. If you think Romney's reading habit doesn't make him stand out, answer this: In your wildest dreams, can you picture John Edwards curled up with any book more complex than one that stars an impish chimp and an inscrutable fellow in a yellow hat?

Since it would be too much to expect journalists to stop asking these questions, what the Romney episode points to is the need for a new subspecies of political consultant—one who will help candidates look literate when it comes to pop culture. Most of the candidates need a crash course on the things that ordinary people like. Desperately. Or do you think Hillary Clinton has a favorite NASCAR driver ready for the inevitable occasion when a plucky Edwards supporter demands to know if she's a Jeff Gordon or Dale Jr. kind of gal?

For the candidates, a deft way with pop culture would do them immeasurable good. The *Wall Street Journal*'s John Fund, a confessed sci-fi fan himself, recently wrote that Romney may have done himself some good with sci-fi fans when he initially cited *Battlefield Earth* as his favorite novel. Frighteningly enough for us normal people, sci-fi fans are legion. In other words, however inadvertently, Romney's copping to liking sci-fi may actually win him some votes.

Now imagine what a candidate could get done if he achieved fluency in pop culture. Picture a candidate who could effortlessly segue from paying homage to Dale Earnhardt's #3 to saying how much *High Noon* has always meant to him. Conjure up a contender who could unashamedly admit that if owning every George Strait record makes him a square, so be it, and then quickly pivot to the many times tears welled in his eyes when sports heroes like Curt Schilling or Willis Reed rose above pain to perform in an almost super-human fashion.

That guy wouldn't just have a lot of admirers who wanted to have a beer with him. He'd also eventually be known as Mr. President. ♦

Liberté, Egalité . . .

Sarkozy!

BY MICHEL GURFINKIEL

Paris

In the first round of balloting on April 22—against multiple candidates spanning the ideological spectrum—France's new president-elect Nicolas Sarkozy garnered a bit more than 31 percent of the vote. Two weeks later, in the head-to-head contest against runner-up Ségolène Royal, he was elected president of France with a bit more than 53 percent of the total. Where did he find the additional 22 percent? There were basically two constituencies to tap: the centrists, who had made a stunning 18.5 percent showing on the first ballot, under François Bayrou; and Jean-Marie Le Pen's far right, a declining force but still pulling in 10.5 percent.

Reuters / Philippe Wojazer

President-elect Nicolas Sarkozy

According to most pollsters and analysts, about half of the centrists supported Sarkozy on May 6, in spite of Bayrou's own flirtation with Royal, the Socialist candidate. This was the case in particular in those areas, like Rouen in Normandy or Nice on the Mediterranean, where local politics have been dominated by a very conservative brand of centrism ever since World War II. But the real breakthrough was with the far right: While Le Pen himself remained neutral and scornful, 90 percent of his voters switched to Sarkozy. Add to this the 2 percent or so who had supported the arch-conservative Euroskeptic Philippe de Villiers on the first ballot, and you get the final 53 percent total.

Le Pen's National Front has been the curse of French politics for almost a quarter of a century. Back in the 1980s, it was essentially the creation of François Mitterrand, the Machiavellian Socialist president, who had been close to fascist circles in his youth and had retained many unsavory personal friends from those years, like René Bousquet, the former top cop of the Vichy regime (and the man who delivered 80,000 French Jews to Adolf Eichmann).

A provocative movement of the far right, so Mitterrand reasoned, would freeze a sizable part of the conservative vote that might otherwise go to more respectable men of the right. Moreover, any attempt from the respectable right to assuage and recover the voters it had lost to Le Pen—especially on issues like immigration and law and order—would be described by the politically correct media as a betrayal of democracy and only serve to further strengthen the left. It was classic divide-and-conquer politics.

The scheme worked beautifully—until it was finally foiled by Sarkozy, who squared the circle. The son and grandson of immigrants from Central

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Europe and the Balkans, half-Jewish on his mother's side, routinely targeted as an alien or a "Bush poodle" or a "Tel-Aviv puppet" by Le Pen and his cronies, the conservative candidate was in a unique position not just to address the taboo issues but to do so in almost the same terms as the National Front. In fact, many former Le Pen supporters had already happily deserted him for Sarkozy on the first ballot (thus cutting the far-right leader's showing nearly in half from his first-round performance in 2002). In the second round, the rest followed, almost to a man.

Apparently, Sarkozy calculates that this achievement is permanent, and that he now needs to win over more centrists and even as many disillusioned Socialists as he possibly can. In the final days of the presidential campaign, he hinted at the creation of a "larger majority," well beyond the conservative UMP party whose banner he carried. A former adviser to Royal, Eric Besson, has already joined the Sarkozy fold. It is rumored that both Claude Allègre, a former Socialist minister of education, and Hubert Védrine, a former Socialist aide to Mitterrand and foreign minister with strong anti-American biases, have been offered positions in the cabinet.

This move is perhaps just tactical. In order to govern France effectively, Sarkozy needs to win the upcoming National Assembly elections, scheduled for June 10 and 17. And that entails, in his opinion, appearing inclusive (especially in the context of renewed rioting in Paris and in other urban areas). More than 1,000 cars have been burned by far-left and ethnic hooligans since Election Day—a disturbance without precedent in recent French politics.

Still unclear is whether Ségolène Royal will lead the Socialist party in the parliamentary elections next month. She lost the presidential ballot, but won herself a name. She may be pathetic as a debater—in the momentous May 2 televised showdown with Sarkozy, she suggested that female police officers should be escorted back home when they go off-duty, as a precaution against street violence and rape—but she is charismatic. And her 47 percent of the vote in May can still translate into a series of local majorities in June, which is the key for a parliamentary victory. In Paris, for instance, Sarkozy won on the second presidential ballot, but the left is poised to carry more seats in the parliamentary election.

Sarkozy's victory will undoubtedly bring about a shift in the political balance of Europe. France, Britain, and Germany, the three major countries in the E.U., are now in conservative or very moderate social democratic hands. It is an odd thing. George W. Bush was supposed to have entirely alienated Europe. But first with Angela Merkel in Germany and now with Sarkozy in France, we see pro-American leaders at the very heart of the E.U. ♦

Michael Ramirez

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The Subjection of Islamic Women

And the fecklessness of American feminism

By Christina Hoff Sommers

The subjection of women in Muslim societies—especially in Arab nations and in Iran—is today very much in the public eye. Accounts of lashings, stonings, and honor killings are regularly in the news, and searing memoirs by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Azar Nafisi have become major best-sellers. One might expect that by now American feminist groups would be organizing protests against such glaring injustices, joining forces with the valiant Muslim women who are working to change their societies. This is not happening.

If you go to the websites of major women's groups, such as the National Organization for Women, the Ms. Foundation for Women, and the National Council for Research on Women, or to women's centers at our major colleges and universities, you'll find them caught up with entirely other issues, seldom mentioning women in Islam. During the 1980s, there were massive demonstrations on American campuses against racial apartheid in South Africa. There is no remotely comparable movement on today's campuses against the gender apartheid prevalent in large parts of the world.

It is not that American feminists are indifferent to the predicament of Muslim women. Nor do they completely ignore it. For a brief period before September 11, 2001, many women's groups protested the brutalities of the Taliban. But they have never organized a full-scale mobilization against gender oppression in the Muslim world. The condition of Muslim women may be the most pressing women's issue of our age, but for many contemporary American feminists it is not a high priority. Why not?

The reasons are rooted in the worldview of the women who shape the concerns and activities of contemporary American feminism. That worldview is—by tendency and sometimes emphatically—antagonistic toward the United States, agnostic about marriage and family, hostile to traditional religion, and wary of femininity. The contrast with Islamic feminism could hardly be greater.

Writing in the *New Republic* in 1999, philosopher Martha Nussbaum noted with disapproval that "feminist theory pays relatively little attention to the struggles of women outside the United States." Too many fashionable gender theorists, she said, have lost their dedication to the public good. Their "hip quietism . . . collaborates with evil."

This was a frontal assault, and prominent academic feminists chastised Nussbaum in the letters column. Joan Scott of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton pointed out the dangers of Nussbaum's "good versus evil scheme." Wrote Scott, "When Robespierre or the Ayatollahs or Ken Starr seek to impose their vision of the 'good' on the rest of society, reigns of terror follow and democratic politics are undermined." Gayatri Spivak, a professor of comparative literature at Columbia, accused Nussbaum of "flag waving" and of being on a "civilizing mission." None of the letter writers addressed her core complaint: Too few feminist theorists are showing concern for the millions of women trapped in blatantly misogynist cultures outside the United States.

One reason is that many feminists are tied up in knots by multiculturalism and find it very hard to pass judgment on non-Western cultures. They are far more comfortable finding fault with American society for minor inequities (the exclusion of women from the Augusta National Golf Club, the "underrepresentation" of women on faculties of engineering) than criticizing heinous practices beyond our shores. The occasional feminist scholar who takes the women's movement to task for neglecting the plight of foreigners is ignored or ruled out of order.

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Take psychology professor Phyllis Chesler. She has been a tireless and eloquent champion of the rights of women for more than four decades. Unlike her tongue-tied colleagues in the academy, she does not hesitate to speak out against Muslim mistreatment of women. In a recent book, *The Death of Feminism*, she attributes the feminist establishment's unwillingness to take on Islamic sexism to its support of "an isolationist and America-blaming position." She faults it for "embracing an anti-Americanism that is toxic, heartless, mindless and suicidal." The sisterhood has rewarded her with excommunication. A 2006 profile in the *Village Voice* reports that, among academic feminists, "Chesler arouses the vitriol reserved for traitors."

But Chesler is right. In the literature of women's studies, the United States is routinely portrayed as if it were just as oppressive as any country in the developing world. Here is a typical example of what one finds in popular women's studies textbooks (from *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, now in its fifth edition):

> The word "terrorism" invokes images of furtive organizations. . . . But there is a different kind of terrorism, one that so pervades our culture that we have learned to live with it as though it were the natural order of things. Its target is females—of all ages, races, and classes. It is the common characteristic of rape, wife battery, incest, pornography, harassment. . . . I call it "sexual terrorism."

AFP / Getty Images

Zilla Huma Usman

The primary focus is on the "terror" at home. Katha Pollitt, a columnist at the *Nation*, talks of "the common thread of misogyny" connecting Christian Evangelicals to the Taliban:

> It is important to remember just how barbarous and cruel the Taliban were. Yet it is also important not to use their example to obscure or deny the common thread of misogyny that connects them with Focus on the Family and the Christian Coalition. . . .

In a similar vein, journalist Barbara Ehrenreich characterizes Christian evangelical movements as "Christian Wahhabism," using the name of the sect that is the state religion of Saudi Arabia and the inspiration for Osama bin Laden. Eve Ensler, lionized author of *The Vagina Monologues*, makes the same point somewhat differently in her popular lecture "Afghanistan is Everywhere":

> We all have different forms of enforced burqas. Every culture has it. Whether it's an idea or a fascist tyranny of what women are supposed to look like—so that women go to the extremes of liposuction, anorexia and bulimia to achieve it—or whether it's being covered in a burqa, we all have deep, profound, ongoing daily forms of oppression.

On most American campuses there are small coteries of self-described "vagina warriors" looking for ways to expose and make much of the ravages of patriarchy. Feminists like Pollitt, Ehrenreich, and Ensler can cite several decades of women's studies research supporting the charge that our culture is ruinous for women. Many scholars—including Camille Paglia, Daphne Patai, Noretta Koertge, Diana Furchtgott-Roth, Christine Rosen, and myself—have questioned the quality of the findings and warned that the studies are twisted and unreliable. But academic feminists rarely engage with such criticism. They dismiss it as "backlash."

Soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Katha Pollitt wrote the introduction to a book called *Nothing Sacred: Women Respond to Religious Fundamentalism and Terror*. It aimed to show that reactionary religious movements everywhere are targeting women. Says Pollitt:

> In Bangladesh, Muslim fanatics throw acid in the faces of unveiled women; in Nigeria, newly established shariah courts condemn women to death by stoning for having sex outside of wedlock. . . . In the United States, Protestant evangelicals and fundamentalists have forged a powerful right-wing political movement focused on banning abortion, stigmatizing homosexuality and limiting young people's access to accurate information about sex.

Pollitt casually places "limiting young people's access to accurate information about sex" and opposing abortion on the same plane as throwing acid in women's faces and stoning them to death. Her hostility to the United States renders her incapable of distinguishing between private American groups that stigmatize gays and foreign govern-

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ments that hang them. She has embraced a feminist philosophy that collapses moral categories in ways that defy logic, common sense, and basic decency.

Eve Ensler takes this line of reasoning to equally ludicrous lengths. In 2003 she gave a lecture at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University in which, like Pollitt, she claimed that women everywhere are oppressed and subordinate:

> I think that the oppression of women is universal. I think we are bonded in every single place of the world. I think the conditions are *exactly* the same [her emphasis]. I think the nature of the oppression—whether it's acid burning in one country, or female genital mutilation in another, or gang rapes in the parking lots in high schools of the suburbs—it's the same idea. . . . The systematic global oppression of women is completely across the globe.

Though Ensler's perspective is warped, her courage and desire to help are commendable. She went to Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban and smuggled out now-famous footage of a terrified woman in a burqa being executed at close range by a man with an AK-47. Ensler has firsthand knowledge of the unique horrors of Islamic gender fascism. But her "feminist theory" obliterates distinctions between what goes on in Afghanistan and what goes on in Beverly Hills:

Photographer Showcase / Ilyas J. Dean

Mukhtar Mai

> I went from Beverly Hills where women were getting vaginal laser rejuvenation surgery—paying four thousand dollars to get their labias trimmed to make them symmetrical because they didn't like the imbalance. And I flew to Kenya where [women were working to stop] the practice of female genital mutilation. And I said to myself, "What is wrong with this picture?"

A better question is: What is wrong with Eve Ensler? These two surgical phenomena are completely different in both scale and purpose. The number of American women who undergo "vaginal labial rejuvenation" is minuscule: There were 793 such procedures in 2005, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. By contrast, a World Health Organization 2000 fact sheet reports: "Today, the number of girls and women who have undergone female genital mutilation is estimated at between 100 and 140 million. It is estimated that each year, a further 2 million girls are at risk of undergoing FGM."

The women who elect laser surgery, moreover, are voluntarily seeking relief from physical irregularities that cause them embarrassment or inhibit their sexual enjoyment. The practitioners of genital mutilation, in countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia, believe that removing sensitive parts of the anatomy is the best way to control young women's sexual urges and assure chastity. Genital cutting causes great pain and suffering and often permanently impairs a female's capacity for sexual pleasure. Thus, the intentions of the handful of American adults who choose labial surgery for themselves are exactly the opposite of those of the African parents and elders who insist on cutting the genitals of millions of girls.

Given her capacity for conceptual confusion, it is perhaps not surprising that Ensler cites "gang rape in a suburban high school parking lot" to show how women in America are menaced. Yes, that is an atrocity. But it happens rarely, and America's allegedly "misogynist" culture reacts to it with revulsion and severe punishments.

Happily, not all women's groups follow the lead of the Enslers, the Pollitts, and the women's studies theorists. The Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) has been intelligently fighting the mistreatment of women in the Muslim world for several years. In 1997, in a heroic effort to expose the crimes of the Taliban, Eleanor Smeal, the president of FMF, with the help of Mavis and Jay Leno, created a vital national campaign complete with rallies, petitions, and fundraisers. It was a good example of what can be achieved when a women's group seriously seeks to address the mistreatment of women outside the United States. The FMF, working with human rights groups, helped to persuade the United States and the United Nations to deny formal recognition to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. It helped convince the oil company UNOCAL not to build a pipeline across Afghanistan, and it brought the oppression of women living under radical Islamic law into clear relief for all the world to see.

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But Smeal and her organization soon found themselves attacked by the same monitors of rectitude who disparaged Martha Nussbaum. Ann Russo, director of women's and gender studies at Chicago's DePaul University (writing in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*), accused the FMF of practicing a kind of "imperial feminism." Said Russo:

> The FMF's campaign narrative is one of colonialist protection rather than of solidarity. . . . [It] capitalizes on the images of prominent white Western women, like Mavis Leno, Eleanor Smeal and other women politicians and celebrity figures, who construct themselves as "free" and "liberated" and thus in the best position to "save" Afghan women.

Today, the Feminist Majority Foundation continues to support Muslim women around the world, but the effort has lost much of its momentum. Most of the foundation's current work is directed against what it perceives as injustices suffered by women in America.

ZUMA Press / Lynn Goldsmith

Irshad Manji

On February 20, 2007, a Pakistani women's rights activist and provincial minister for social welfare, Zilla Huma Usman, was shot to death by a Muslim fanatic for not wearing a veil. And he had a second reason for killing her: She had encouraged girls in her community to take part in outdoor sports. The plight of women like Usman does not figure in NOW's "Six Priority Items," although Global Feminism is one of the 19 subjects it designates as "Other Important Issues." NOW hardly mentions Muslim women, except in the context of the demand that the U.S. military withdraw from Iraq. So what sort of issue *does* the flagship feminist organization consider important?

NOW has just launched a 2007 "Love Your Body" calendar as part of its ongoing initiative of the same name. The body calendar warns of an increase in eating disorders and includes a photograph celebrating the shape of pears. There is also an image of the Statue of Liberty with the caption, "Give me your curves, your wrinkles, your natural beauty yearning to breathe free." The calendar bears these inspiring words: "None of us is free until we are all free."

To breathe free, college women are encouraged to organize "Love Your Body" evenings. NOW suggests they host "Indulgence" parties: "Invite friends over and encourage them to wear whatever makes them feel good—sweat suits, flip flops, pajamas—and serve delicious, decadent foods or silly snacks without the guilt. Urge everyone to come prepared to talk about their feelings and experiences."

This is pathetic. To be sure, serious eating disorders afflict a small percentage of women. But much larger numbers suffer because poor eating habits and inactivity render them overweight, even obese. NOW should not be encouraging college girls to indulge themselves in ways detrimental to their well-being. Nor should it be using the language of human rights in discussing the weight problems of American women.

The inability to make simple distinctions shows up everywhere in contemporary feminist thinking. *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*, edited by geographer Joni Seager, is a staple in women's studies classes in universities. It was named "Reference Book of the Year" by the American Library Association and has received other awards. Seager, formerly a professor of women's studies and chair of geography at the University of Vermont, is now dean of environmental studies at York University in Toronto. Her atlas, a series of color-coded maps and charts, documents the status of women, highlighting the countries where women are most at risk for poverty, illiteracy, and oppression.

One map shows how women are kept "in their place" by restrictions on their mobility, dress, and behavior. Somehow the United States comes out looking as bad in this respect as Uganda: Both countries are shaded dark yellow, to signify extremely high levels of restriction. Seager explains that in parts of Uganda, a man can claim an unmarried woman for his wife by raping her. The United States gets the same rating because, Seager says, "state legislators enacted 301 anti-abortion measures between 1995 and 2001." Never mind that the Ugan-

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dan practice is barbaric, while the activism surrounding abortion in the United States is a sign of a contentious and free democracy working out its disagreements. Besides which, Seager's categories obscure the fact that in Uganda, abortion is illegal and "unsafe abortion is the leading cause of maternal mortality" (so states a 2005 report by the Guttmacher Institute), while American abortion law, even after the recent adoption of state regulations, is generally considered among the most liberal of any nation.

On another map the United States gets the same rating for domestic violence as Pakistan. Seager reports that in the United States, "22 percent-35 percent of women who seek emergency medical assistance at hospital are there for reasons of domestic violence." Wrong. She apparently misread a Justice Department study showing that 22 percent-35 percent of women who go to hospitals *because of violent attacks* are there for reasons of domestic violence. When this correction is made, the figure for domestic-violence victims in emergency rooms drops to a fraction of 1 percent. Why would Seager so uncritically seize on a dubious statistic? Like many academic feminists, she is eager to show that American women live under an intimidating system of "patriarchal authority" that is comparable to those found in many less developed countries. Never mind that this is wildly false.

Reuters Photo Archive / Michael Kooren

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Hard-line feminists such as Seager, Pollitt, Ensler, the university gender theorists, and the NOW activists represent the views of only a tiny fraction of American women. Even among women who identify themselves as feminists (about 25 percent), they are at the radical extreme. But in the academy and in most of the major women's organizations, the extreme is the mean. The hard-liners set the tone and shape the discussion. This is a sad state of affairs. Muslim women could use moral, intellectual, and material support from the West to improve their situation. But only a rational, reality-based women's movement would be capable of actually helping. Women who think that looking like a pear is an essential human right are not valuable allies.

The good news is that Muslim women are not waiting around for Western feminists to rescue them. "Feminists in the West may fiddle while Muslim women are burning," wrote Manhattan Institute scholar Kay Hymowitz in a prescient 2003 essay, "but in the Muslim world itself there is a burgeoning movement to address the miserable predicament of the second sex." The number of valiant and resourceful Muslim women who are devoting themselves to the cause of greater freedom grows each and every day.

They have a heritage to build on. There have been organized women's movements in countries such as Iran, Lebanon, and Egypt for more than a century. And many women in Turkey, Morocco, and Tunisia already enjoy almost Western levels of freedom. But as radical Islam tightens its grip in places like Iran and rural Pakistan, and as it increasingly threatens Muslim women everywhere, even some devoutly religious women are quietly organizing to resist. Mehrangiz Kar, an Iranian human rights lawyer, now a researcher at Harvard Law School, predicts that "a feminist explosion is well on its way."

Islamic feminists believe that women's rights are compatible with Islam rightly understood. One of their central projects is progressive religious reform. Through careful translation and interpretation of the Koran and other sacred texts, scholars challenge interpretations that have been used to justify sexist customs. They point out that forced veiling, arranged marriages, and genital cutting are rooted in tribal paganism and are nowhere enjoined by the Koran. Where the Koran explicitly permits a practice such as the physical chastisement of wives by husbands, the feminist exegetes try to show that, like slavery, the practice is anachronistic and incompatible with the true spirit of the faith. This kind of interpretation of scripture has been practiced by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scholars for centuries. Now Islamic women want to play a part in it, and nothing in Islamic law, they believe, prohibits their doing so.

This past November more than 100 Muslim lawyers, scholars, and activists from 25 countries gathered in New York City for the express purpose of supporting the mod-

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ernization of Islamic jurisprudence and reviving the spirit of *ijtihad*, a once vibrant Islamic tradition of independent thinking and reasoning about sacred texts. The organizing group, the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity (WISE), plans to launch an international *shura*, a consultative council of Muslim women leaders who will advise religious and political leaders on women's issues. They are also establishing a scholarship fund for the training of gifted female students to become Koranic scholars, or *muftia*. These women would be licensed to render *fatwas*, religious judgments that, while nonbinding, drive custom and practice in Islamic societies.

The WISE participants were a who's who of Muslim women lawyers, writers, and rights advocates. Perhaps the most affecting speaker was Mukhtar Mai. She is the Pakistani woman who, in 2002, was gang-raped by four men because of crimes allegedly committed by her brother. After the rape, which was sanctioned by an all-male village council, Mukhtar Mai was expected to preserve the "honor" of her family by killing herself. Instead, she and her family went to the police, even at the risk of being charged for the "crime" of being raped. A local imam, outraged by her treatment, denounced the attack in his Friday sermon. Reporters soon appeared, and Mukhtar's case became a *cause célèbre*.

The conference participants varied widely in their politics and their relation to Islam. Unlike the present American feminist movement, which has no place for traditionally religious women, Islamic feminism is inclusive. Some of its proponents wear the veil, others oppose it. Some want egalitarian mosques, others don't mind traditional arrangements where men and women are separated. Even a few non-Muslims were present. What unites them in feminism is their commitment to the universal dignity of women. They are all vehemently opposed to such practices as forced marriages, honor killings, genital cutting, child marriage, and wife-beating. They are passionately dedicated to the educational, economic, legal, and political advancement of women.

The feminism that is quietly surging in the Muslim world is quite different from its contemporary counterpart in the United States. Islamic feminism is faith-based, family-centered, and well-disposed towards men. This is feminism in its classic and most effective form, as students of women's emancipation know. American women won the vote in the early 20th century through the combined forces of progressivism and conservatism. Radical thinkers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Alice Paul played an indispensable role, but it was traditionalists like Frances Willard (president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union) and Carrie Chapman Catt (founder of the League of Women Voters) who brought the cause of women's suffrage into the mainstream.

In particular, Frances Willard—today an almost forgotten figure—was beloved and immensely famous at the time of her death in 1898. She had a gift for reaching out to devoutly religious women and showing them how political equality was consistent with piety. This moved men too. She was critical in turning the once elite suffrage movement into a groundswell.

Today's feminists have anathematized Willard because she held two conventional views they find intolerable: She regarded "womanliness" as a virtue and a source of strength, power, and beauty, not as a socially constructed domestic prison; and she advanced women's rights within, not in opposition to, the framework of traditional religion. These two traits are precisely the ones that gave Willard mass appeal in her own day and that make her philosophy relevant to women struggling for their rights inside highly traditional Islamic societies.

In Search of Islamic Feminism, a 1998 book by University of Texas Middle Eastern studies professor Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, offers a rare glimpse of Muslim women activists. In Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Turkey, and Iraq, Fernea kept encountering what she calls "family feminism." Several of the women she interviewed reject what they see as divisiveness in today's American feminism. As one Iraqi women's advocate, Haifa Abdul Rahman, told her, "We see feminism in America as dividing women from men, separating women from the family. This is bad for everyone." Fernea was not only struck by the family orientation of the women she encountered, she was also awed by their feminine graciousness. The Italian novelist and essayist Italo Calvino once made a list of requirements for a successful liberation movement. Almost as an afterthought, he added, "There must also be beauty." There is beauty in Islamic feminism.

Islamic feminism has some celebrated adherents, among them the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi, the Iranian Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, and the Canadian journalist and human rights activist Irshad Manji. In her 2004 feminist manifesto, *The Trouble with Islam Today*, Manji writes, "We Muslims . . . are in crisis and we are dragging the rest of the world with us. If ever there was a moment for an Islamic reformation, it's now."

Manji is right: In particular, a feminist reformation could be as dangerous to the dreams of the jihadists as any military assault by the West. After all, the oppression of women is not an incidental feature of the societies that foster terrorism. It is a linchpin of the system of social control that the jihadists are fighting to impose world-

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wide. Women's equality is as incompatible with radical Islam's plan for domination and submission as it is with polygamy. Women freely moving about, expressing their opinions, and negotiating their relationships with men from a position of equal dignity rather than servitude are a moderating, civilizing force in any society. Female scholars voicing their opinions without inhibition would certainly puncture some cherished jihadist fantasies.

Is an Islamic feminist reformation a realistic hope? In the last speech of her life, in 1906, American feminist pioneer Susan B. Anthony famously told her audience, "Failure is impossible." Anthony, however, was formed by and worked within a liberal democracy founded on the proposition that all men are created equal. Even when the American women's movement was at its most controversial in the 19th and early 20th centuries, its exponents, with few exceptions, risked only ridicule or shunning. Today's Muslim feminists face imprisonment, lashing, disfigurement, and murder. The leader of the radical wing of the 19th-century American women's movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was a religious skeptic and harshly critical of sexism in the Bible. Her views were met by social antagonism and stern disapproval from more conservative feminists—all of it civil and peaceable. Stanton's present-day counterpart, Somali-born Dutch author Ayaan Hirsi Ali (now my colleague at the American Enterprise Institute), is a religious skeptic who is harshly critical of sexism in the Koran. Her views are met by violence and death threats from Muslim fanatics. She has to be escorted by bodyguards.

epa / Corbis / Houbais Mustafa

Fatima Mernissi

Success, then, is not certain. Yet there are many hopeful signs. Experience in Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey is encouraging. Groups like WISE are holding up a new image of female piety that does not require silence, powerlessness, and second-class citizenship. And individual women such as Pakistan's Mukhtar Mai, Morocco's Fatima Mernissi, Iran's Shirin Ebadi, Canada's Irshad Manji, and Holland's Ayaan Hirsi Ali are offering the world profiles in astonishing courage and grace. Their example may prove as infectious as it is inspiring. Radical Islam does indeed pose an extreme challenge to the cause of women's rights—but these wise and brave women pose a devastating and unexpected challenge to radical Islam.

I asked Daisy Kahn, executive director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement and organizer of the WISE conference, how Americans can help. Her answer was simple: "Support us. Embrace our struggle." That is already happening, though mostly outside feminist circles. There are scores of independent organizations—groups like Freedom House, Global Giving, the Independent Women's Forum, Project Ijtihad, Equality Now, and the Initiative for Inclusive Security—that have begun to work in effective ways to support Muslim women. Such groups, both liberal and conservative, may not identify themselves as feminist, but they embody the ideals and principles of the classical, humane feminism of Stanton, Anthony, and Willard.

Those "First Wave" reformers made history. Their classical "equity" feminism was predominant in the United States long before the current band of activists and theorists transformed and debased it beyond recognition. Their understanding of equality was never at war with femininity, never at war with men, or with family, or with logic or common sense. It is alive again in Islamic feminism.

The women who constitute the American feminist establishment today are destined to play little role in the battle for Muslim women's rights. Preoccupied with their own imagined oppression, they can be of little help to others—especially family-centered Islamic feminists. The Katha Pollitts and Eve Enslers, the vagina warriors and university gender theorists—these are women who cannot distinguish between free and unfree societies, between the Taliban and the Promise Keepers, between being forced to wear a veil and being socially pressured to be slender and fit. Their moral obtuseness leads many of them to regard helping Muslim women as "colonialist" or as part of a "hegemonic" "civilizing mission." It disqualifies them as participants in this moral fight.

In reality, of course, it is the Islamic feminists themselves who are on a civilizing mission—one that is vital to their own welfare and to the welfare of an anxious world. A reviewer of Irshad Manji's manifesto celebrating Islamic feminism aptly remarked, "This could be Osama bin Laden's worst nightmare." Ipso facto, it should be our fondest dream. And if, along the way, Islamic feminism were to have a wholesome influence on American feminism, so much the better. ♦

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The Sane Fringe Candidate

Meet John Cox, Republican candidate for president

By Matt Labash

Los Angeles

When you have a name like John Cox—a plain vanilla name, an achromatic name, a name that people with more distinctive names would choose if they'd committed a heinous crime and needed to start afresh on the lam—it's easy to feel like everyman and no man. *Switchboard.com*, the online directory, says that there are 1,979 John Coxes throughout the land. But there is only one John H. Cox. Actually, there are 66 of them. But there's only one who is running to be president of the United States of America.

That John Cox, the Chicago millionaire who was the first declared Republican candidate (as of March 2006), called our offices a few weeks ago. He sounded vexed. He sounded desperate. He sounded like a man who was tired of screaming into the void. He needed something that any self-assured, self-contained, well-adjusted person who enters the political arena needs: He needed the validation of people he'd never met.

A good Reaganite conservative, Cox has tried to be self-sufficient, financing his campaign thus far to the tune of $800,000. After 20 trips, he's been to all 99 counties in Iowa. He's been to New Hampshire 14 times, and South Carolina, 10. He's won a Republican straw poll outright in Aiken County, South Carolina, and finished fifth in total votes among all Republican contenders when three other counties were totaled. And yet, he's lucky if he ever gets mentioned in mainstream media candidate roundups. Meanwhile, doing interviews with the *Small Government Times* just isn't putting him over the top.

I'm not going to lie, I felt sorry for John Cox. He needed some media attention, and last time I checked my lapsed 2002 congressional press pass, I was a member of the media. I decided to redress this injustice and go see John Cox. I've spent a fair amount of time around fringe candidates, but he didn't seem like the others. He doesn't own a sandwich board or a megaphone. He never says "blood for oil" when critiquing the war in Iraq. His suits fit, and he has no tendrils of out-of-control ear hair.

By no means is he humorless, but he seems like a serious person. Let him tell it: "I'm a serious person." Born poor on Chicago's South Side to a mother who was raped by a father who split shortly thereafter (he points to his very existence as the reason he's adamantly against abortion), Cox, 51, is a self-made man. He finished college in two and a half years "because I was paying for it," he says, adding, "My daughter finished in five years—because I was paying for it." He later went on to start several businesses: a law/accounting firm, an investment advisory firm, a real estate management company, and a venture capital firm. In the mid-'90s, he led a group that purchased the Jays Foods potato chip manufacturer, sparing more than 600 local jobs and taking it from a $17-million loss to a $3-million profit in less than a year.

In the red flag department, he has run unsuccessfully for office in Illinois three times: in a congressional, senatorial, and Cook County recorder of deeds race. But even in his most recent loss, in 2004, his high principle was in evidence. He spent around $200,000 of his own money running for the recorder's job on the promise to eliminate the position as wasteful spending if he won—the kind of idea that used to fire up conservatives back when they were, how to put it, conservative.

Still, if you're not an elected official or a celebrity, there is no surer way for a serious person to come to be considered unserious than to run for president. When I informed a colleague that I was going to write a piece on a sane fringe candidate, he looked at me disbelievingly: "Isn't that an oxymoron?"

The advantage of writing about someone who has absolutely no chance of winning is that you get to dictate

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terms. I agreed to see John Cox, but told him there'd be some conditions. I would not be manhandled or warded off at crucial junctures by any punk press secretaries. Also, I would be granted exclusive access. He told me nobody wanted access, so that wouldn't be a problem. He added that I'd better get out there shortly, he was having an important press conference on Monday. That would mean I'd have to fly to Chicago on Sunday. But it was perfect weather outside, and I wanted to get some fishing in over the weekend. "Can you bump it to Tuesday?" I asked. "I don't see why not," he said.

In Chicago, we meet up at a trendy Asian fusion restaurant. In tow are his 25-year-old daughter (he has three others, including a 2-year-old) and his attractive second wife, Sarah, who is 11 years his junior. His first marriage broke up, he says, "because she didn't love me anymore." Sarah is partly responsible for his presidential run. Tired of seeing him barking at the television, at the corrupt and profligate Republican leadership as well as at the feckless president (Cox supported the war, but calls its mismanagement "nothing short of an absolute disaster—Iraqis are pumping less oil today than they were before we invaded"), Sarah told him, "Why don't you do something about it?"

They were supposed to go on a trip the next day, but Cox stayed up all night. Waking early the next morning, Sarah found him sitting in the living room at 6 A.M., reading a Reagan book. "He said, 'Honey, I'm going to run for president.'" Her first reaction: "Oh. My. God." Her second reaction: "I said, 'Well, if you want to do it, go ahead.' He's got a lot of energy."

Cox feels that none of the current crop of Republicans is actually carrying the leadership mantle of Ronald Reagan. And it's not, he wishes you to know, like he's one of those weirdo Reagan fetishists. Reagan had plenty of faults. "It's not that he was some giant," Cox says. "It's just that he stood head and shoulders above all the other midgets."

Cox feels he can do the same, given the faux-conservative "Rudy McRomney" midgets currently in the on-deck circle. He says he doesn't even necessarily want to be president—he has a great life—he just wants to see the job done properly. "I'm pissed, because I expected something better out of a conservative Republican president. On everything—Iraq, immigration, spending." And many true conservatives he meets feel the same, which is how a no-name like him can win a South Carolina straw poll, a feat he mentions at the slightest prompting, or at none.

The next morning, I arrive early at the Intercontinental Hotel to get a good seat for Cox's brace-yourself announcement—that he has paid his $25,000 registration fee, and is on the South Carolina ballot. I needn't have bothered. There's nobody around, except for some California Closet Company conventioneers. When I ask the concierge where the John Cox press conference is, he says, "John who?" Cox's amiable press secretary, Dan Herren, a South Carolina political hand who's a Re/Max realtor on the side, tells me this isn't out of the norm. When Cox tells strangers he's running for president, a common reaction is "President of what?"

I find my way to the proper room. A "JLS Foods Inc." sign is still in the placard bracket from an event the day before. Only two reporters are there—a guy from a radio wire service and me. Cox, who is silver-haired and trim, immaculately tailored in a charcoal suit with a blue pinstripe, looks disappointed but not surprised. He muses that it doesn't help that the nationwide May Day immigrant-rights rallies are taking place the same day. Not only are illegals taking our jobs, they're taking our publicity.

Still, even while he makes plenty of noise about the need to seal our borders, the corrupt Mexican government, and a crackdown on businesses that hire illegals, he will not set his hair on fire by becoming a pandering immigrant-basher—he points to fellow GOP hopeful Tom Tancredo as an example. "I refuse to lower myself," says Cox. "I'm a businessman. I've got clients. I'm not going to make myself out to be a buffoon."

Cox eyes us two journalists, then says, "No need to go there," nodding at the podium. Instead, he pulls up a chair next to us. "It's much more intimate this way," I say, trying to make him feel better. "Most of my gatherings are pretty intimate," he says, with a pained smile. He tells us he is on the South Carolina ballot, and hits the highlights of his platform: how he wants to eliminate the IRS and our disastrous, confusing, punitive tax system and go to a "fair tax" (a consumption tax), how he's pro-life and pro-Social Security reform, how he's anti-spending and anti-corruption. I can't speak for the radio reporter, but to me it sounds pretty good. Though he didn't have to go into all those details. He had me at "eliminate the IRS."

Later, Cox, Herren, and I adjourn to his well-appointed Gold Coast apartment, which stands sentry over Lake Michigan, on the 45th floor of a high-rise. His mahogany-paneled office evidences how different he'd be from Bush, who has bragged that he is undistracted by reading newspapers. Cox, by contrast, has three TV monitors on the wall beaming nonstop news, and has eight postal bins filled with newspapers. He reads five or so a day during his morning workout on a recumbent bike. Since he and Sarah spend four months a year at their place in Naples, Florida, he's accumulated a backlog—the papers in the bins—which he intends to go through to make sure he hasn't missed anything.

But it is not current events Cox has on the brain. Or

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AP Photo / Anne McQuary

John Cox addresses Spartanburg County, S.C., Republicans, April 21, 2007.

rather, it is only one current event—the Republican debate at the Ronald Reagan Library in Simi Valley. It's going off in two days, and all Republican candidates have been invited to participate. All, that is, except Cox. It makes him feel like the only kid left out of the class birthday party, and it's taking a psychic toll. He gets Joanne Drake on the phone from the Library, which is organizing the debate along with MSNBC and *Politico.com*.

He is extremely courteous: "Hello, Joanne, my name is John Cox, and believe me, I understand you are probably running around like a maniac." He tells her he feels he should be included, but understands that he isn't. He tells her that he won a straw poll in South Carolina, and got more votes in other straw polls than many of the better-known candidates.

He tells her, "It's so ironic that this is at the Reagan Library, because I love Ronald Reagan. I've been to your library three or four times. You know who [supply-side guru] Arthur Laffer is? He's written that he fundamentally agrees with everything about my book"—his new 220-page book, *Politics, Inc.*, that sets out his ideas. (As a novice, Cox is under the mistaken impression that presidential campaigns are about ideas.) If they won't let him debate, the least she can do, pretty please, is to let him plead his case to the media in the spin room. She says she'll run it up the flagpole and get back to him. She never does.

It doesn't matter though. John Cox is a true conservative, and he doesn't wait for others to make his good fortune—he makes his own. So Cox, Herren, and I, along with his wife, two-year-old daughter, and nanny, fly out to Los Angeles anyway. Cox hasn't exactly worked out what he's going to do. Herren had suggested perhaps hiring Lincoln and Reagan impersonators to stage a debate about why Cox should be included. But they decide against—wouldn't be very presidential.

He tries all morning to call various MSNBC executives and is extra irate because at the last second, CNBC cancels a much-needed television appearance he was supposed to make on *Squawk Box*. "I have a feeling I'm causing ripples up and down MSNBC—they want me to go away," he tells me. "Wasn't I personable? Rational? Courteous? There's a fine line here. I don't want people thinking I'm a crazy man, calling and threatening. I'm just a believer in the U.S. Constitution. In the Soviet Union, they blackball candidates. Let the public decide if I'm crazy or legitimate."

As we arrive at LAX and Cox is loading his luggage in a rented Highlander, he finally gets NBC News senior vice president Phil Griffin on the phone: "I don't want to make trouble, all I want to do is see America get better. I'm not a kook. I'm a substantial person. I won a straw poll." He asks Griffin to let him in the spin room. Griffin says he'll make some calls and get back to him. He never does.

The debate is the next day, so Cox wants to run out to the Library to scout out its penetrability. We drive an hour and a half in rush hour traffic from our Santa Monica hotel to get there at closing time. Cox enters the atrium of the Library, and asks to see his old nemesis, Joanne Drake. He looks official, so security starts to get her on the phone, asking if he has an appointment. Cox, who is nothing if not honest, says he

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doesn't, but he's a presidential candidate. The formerly friendly security guards start to exchange nervous looks. When Cox spots a media rep, and tries to corner her to again make his spin-room pitch, we are all asked to leave the grounds immediately.

I'd suspected this would be our reception. So I'd made some back-up plans. Before joining up with Cox, I'd told him that I was credentialed for the debate, so he should get someone from his campaign to apply to be my photographer, which Herren had done. The next day—debate day—we arrive early at the press credentialing table. I pick up my lammie, and Dan picks up his, giving it to Cox. Cox and I board the media shuttle bus at the bottom of a hill that runs us up to the Reagan Library. Cox, it appears, will have his day in the spin room.

But he is unhappy about the whole arrangement. It demeans him, he feels. I tell him to get with the program. His look is all wrong. For one thing, he's wearing American eagle suspenders over a crisp, white dress shirt. If he wants to pass for a journalist, he can't go around looking patriotic. "Put on your suit jacket," I tell him. As we arrive at the Library and walk through its gates, I give him more pointers on how to pass for a reporter. "If you see anything free, especially a drink, take it," I say. I hand him a prop reporter's notebook, and tell him if anyone asks why he's not holding a camera, since he's supposed to be my photographer, tell them he's taking mental pictures.

As I leave him at a courtyard buffet table, where journalists are inhaling raspberry sugar cookies and iced tea (the bar doesn't open until later), I turn to interview some elderly docents, who give me details on the Library's architecture and vegetation. I watch out of the corner of my eye, as Cox, on his cell phone, walks across the lawn. He might as well be wearing a neon "imposter" sign: His posture is too good, his clothes are too pressed, he is way too distinguished-looking and silver-haired, like Blake Carrington out for a stroll—really un-journalist-like. He disappears from my radar. Minutes later, when I find him again, he is standing next to a burly security goon outside the gate. I ask him what happened. "Umm, the guy came over and found out who I am." I ask how that could've happened. Not a single person had recognized him since we'd been there. "I told him," Cox says unapologetically. "I'm not going to lie to anybody."

We are bounced from the debate before it even begins. As we ride past the fringe-sters on the curb—Ron Paul supporters wearing dolphin suits to illustrate Mitt Romney's flip flops, guys in "Stop Chemtrails" hats, etc.—Cox grows reflective:

"Am I an anarchist? What have I done to merit the treatment I'm getting here? This country needs leadership, leadership from people who've actually accomplished something in their lives. What you saw demonstrated today is the real problem. Who, with any level of achievement, would want to get involved in this nonsense? If you've achieved something, created value and wealth in a business world where intelligence and skill and inventiveness are rewarded, is it going to be attractive to go into politics where you've got to steal a press pass to get heard?

"And so what do we end up with for leadership? We end up with the sons of former presidents who put us in a war and botch the whole thing up. We end up with politicians who make deals for bridges to nowhere. Is that what we want? Someone who's been in public office their whole life? Will that prepare them for solving problems? What prepares you to solve problems, I would submit, is a life spent actually solving problems. Actually *doing* something. Am I wrong?"

Cox will have his debate one way or another. So we go back to our hotel on Santa Monica beach. A good fiscal conservative, Herren's sought out a cheap wedding videographer instead of an expensive LA film crew to show up with a camera. Since the hotel room doesn't get MSNBC, Cox's wife mans the live Internet debate feed, waiting for questions to be asked, then hitting the mute button, so Cox can answer for the benefit of the videocamera and eventually a YouTube audience. He wants to show America what they missed. He rips for 90 minutes straight, taking all questions, sometimes taking them twice, when the same question is batted around to multiple candidates who are actually at the debate.

His isn't a performance for the ages, but it's surprisingly good. I expected a clown show. But there are no gaffes. He is fluid and calm, optimistic without seeming Pollyannaish, critical without seeming a crank, at ease with all issues—a man who knows his own mind and isn't afraid to speak it. After his one-man debate, as he sits down at a desk, he seems reinvigorated.

"What's frustrating," he says, "is that I know I could've done well up there. But they won't let me off the bench. Actually, they won't even let me in the stadium to sit on the bench. So I guess I'm making my own stadium." And he is, too. A week later, he sues Fox News to force them to let him into their televised debate. As the *New York Sun* reported, "During his announcement at the News Corp. [parent company of The Weekly Standard] building in Midtown yesterday, Mr. Cox had to compete with red-spandex-clad cheerleaders for the New Jersey Nets who had arrived at the same spot to promote the team. While dozens stopped to gawk at the women, few paid attention to Mr. Cox."

It doesn't matter, though—he's used to being overshadowed. Presidential campaigns are a marathon, not a sprint. He will stick to the end. Or his name isn't John Cox. ♦

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An Iraq To-Do List

How we can help the surge succeed

By Max Boot

Since February, General David Petraeus and his team in Baghdad have been implementing classic counterinsurgency precepts that have worked wherever they have been tried in adequate strength over a sustained period of time—from the Philippines and South Africa in the early 1900s to Malaya in the 1950s, El Salvador in the 1980s, and Northern Ireland in the 1990s. They are surging more troops into troubled areas and pushing them off the remote fortress-like Forward Operating Bases and into neighborhoods where they conduct foot patrols, erect concrete barriers, and establish a street-level sense of security. The situation in Anbar province has improved substantially, and, while the areas around Baghdad remain deeply troubled, there are signs of progress in the capital itself. (Sectarian murders are down two-thirds since January, though deaths from spectacular suicide bombings remain high.)

Where such strategies have worked, the results were achieved in years, not months. The same is likely true of Iraq, so patience remains the order of the day. But while Petraeus has the fundamentals right, there are still reforms that could be implemented to improve the odds of success. During a recent two-week visit with U.S. forces in Iraq, I saw a number of problems that need fixing, starting with the inadequate size of the Iraqi army.

The army is the most effective and nonsectarian institution in Iraq. Although it has its share of woes, its combat performance has been improving, and it is less corrupt than the police. But it's too small. Saddam Hussein kept more than 900,000 men under arms at the time of the 1991 Gulf war, a figure that had shrunk to fewer than 400,000 by the time of the U.S. invasion in 2003. Today the Iraqi army is only 136,000 strong. (There are another 194,000 police officers and 125,000 Facility Protection Service personnel, but many of them are useless or worse.) There is talk within the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and the American high command of expanding the Iraqi army by 35,000 to 40,000 soldiers a year for the next three years, but even this isn't enough. The army needs to be at least 300,000-400,000 strong. (The Afghan army likewise needs to be expanded, but that's another story.)

Recruiting hasn't been a problem, not when unemployment is 20 percent or more. But it still may make sense to introduce conscription—something that is alien to currently serving American soldiers, all of whom are volunteers, but that has a long history in Iraq and neighboring states. An army in a developing nation like Iraq isn't there merely to fight internal and external enemies. Its mission is also to inculcate a civic religion of nationalism and egalitarianism in its recruits. Germany, Japan, Turkey, and other newly created states in the 19th and early 20th centuries turned the army into a "schoolhouse of the nation." That requires exposing a large percentage of young men to army training and indoctrination, not just a handpicked few. Iraq could usefully emulate their example, even if it does run the risk that, as in those societies, the army could become the ultimate arbiter of political power.

Expanding the army will require more money, and the United States should probably increase its military-assistance spending, but the Iraqis are starting to help themselves as well. This year, for the first time, the Iraqi government is spending more on its security services (some $9 billion) than the amount of U.S. aid ($5 billion), and the Ministry of Defense has managed to spend 90 percent of its budget, which puts it well ahead of the curve in the semi-functional Maliki government. In any case, the cost of draftee soldiers would be less than that of volunteers, since they wouldn't have to be offered as much pay or benefits; they could also be employed with fewer restrictions on where and when they serve.

An expansion of the Iraqi army will also require an expansion of the number and quality of American advis-

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ers, which should not be that great a stretch, since even Democrats say they want to continue the advisory effort indefinitely. But while increasing support for the Iraqi security forces—and working hard to promote even-handed, effective commanders—it is important to resist the temptation to impose our standards in all matters great and small. American advisers may unwittingly hold back the Iraqis in some instances by insisting they conform to the extraordinarily stringent standards of the U.S. armed forces—rules that, in terms of ethical conduct, are probably a good deal stricter than those previously employed by any army sent to quell any major insurgency in the long history of warfare.

The *New York Times* ran a front-page dispatch by Alissa J. Rubin on April 22 ("3 Suspects Talk After Iraqi Soldiers Do Dirty Work") reporting that Iraqi troops managed to break up a major terrorist ring in the violent Baghdad neighborhood of Ghazaliya by beating up a captured insurgent. Such conduct is not tolerated in the American ranks, but the Iraqis are fighting for their lives against the most vicious terrorists on earth in a society that has never heard of the Warren Court. It's hardly surprising that they might resort to "third degree" techniques that were in widespread use by American police until a generation ago, and remain commonplace throughout much of the rest of the world. American advisers need to have the leeway to exercise their best judgment—to be able to turn a blind eye to minor abuses without risking court martial, while at the same time remaining vigilant against major abuses. Just as no counterinsurgency has ever been won employing the norms of modern Western peacetime policing, so too it is very rare to defeat insurgents by terrorizing the population into acquiescence—and in any case that is not a strategy that either the United States or its allies could employ.

In walking the line between excessive lenience and excessive brutality, the Iraqi government needs to build more prisons. The U.S. armed forces have been expanding capacity at their two main holding facilities, Camp Cropper in Baghdad and Camp Bucca in southern Iraq (which replaced Abu Ghraib after it was closed last year). The total prison population, which stood at less than 15,000 last year, is now 19,000, and the plan is to expand to 25,000-30,000 by the end of the summer, when the Baghdad security plan will be in full swing. The number of detainees held in Iraqi custody is unknown but estimated at perhaps 20,000. It's not enough. As military analysts

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Bing West and Eliot Cohen wrote not long ago, "One in 75 American males is in jail, compared to one in 450 Iraqi males." Since, as they note, "Iraq is not six times safer than the United States," the disparity needs to be addressed if Iraq is to become substantially more peaceful.

Part of the answer is to help the Iraqis build more prisons and appoint more judges. The coalition's Rule of Law Project is doing just that by constructing a facility within the Green Zone that will house not only 6,000 prisoners but also the judges who will try their cases. This is necessary to prevent intimidation of judges, which is said to be widespread and which results in "not guilty" verdicts in many cases in which U.S. troops are convinced the evidence is overwhelming.

But it is doubtful that any civilian legal system, much less one as anemic as Iraq's, could cope with the demands of wartime. The obvious answer is selective use of martial law to quell violence, giving authority to sentence insurgents to the same people who are risking their lives to catch them—Iraqi and American army officers. This would, of course, be controversial within Iraq. And since the United States is no longer an occupying power, we cannot impose martial law ourselves, but we could make it one of the points on which we lobby the Maliki government for results.

Next, create a readily accessible national identity database. This is an essential prerequisite for a successful counterinsurgency, yet it has never been implemented in Iraq, because successive American commanders have never thought they would be in the country long enough to pull off a project that might require a minimum of six to twelve months to implement. U.S. and Iraqi troops trying to identify potential insurgents have to rely either on food rationing cards, many of which are out of date and all of which lack biometric data such as fingerprints, or on their own haphazard surveys. Unfortunately, most of the data that U.S. troops amass during their tours of duty is lost when they rotate home. There is no uniform database to share population information among all security forces, American and Iraqi, current and future. Thus it's hard to know if someone stopped at a checkpoint belongs in the neighborhood or whether he is a wanted terrorist from another province. This is the kind of information that any U.S. cop would have available within seconds of a traffic stop, because he would run a check via a wireless computer terminal on the motorist's license plate and driver's license. Security forces need to have this same capability in Iraq. There is talk now within the Iraqi government of implementing such a system, but given the Maliki administration's lack of capacity, nothing meaningful will happen unless the Americans do it themselves.

Another necessity is to go more aggressively after foreign fighters. They comprise a relatively small percentage of the overall insurgency, but they account for a very high percentage of the most grotesque attacks—80 to 90 percent of all suicide bombings, according to General Petraeus's briefing with Pentagon reporters on April 26. These jihadists are of many nationalities, but most infiltrate from Syria. The Bush administration has repeatedly vowed that Syria would suffer unspecified consequences if it did not cut off this terrorist pipeline, but so far this has been an empty threat. The administration has refused to authorize Special Operations forces to hit terrorist safe houses and "rat lines" on the Syrian side of the border, even though international law recognizes the right of "hot pursuit" and holds states liable for letting their territory be used to stage attacks on neighbors. It's high time to unleash our covert operators—Delta Force, the SEALs, and other units in the Joint Special Operations Command—to take the fight to the enemy. They can stage low-profile raids with great precision, and Syrian president Bashar Assad would have scant ability to retaliate. We also need to apply greater pressure to Iran, which continues to support both Shiite and Sunni terrorist groups in Iraq, but that will be harder to do because Tehran is a more formidable adversary than Damascus.

There are some less urgent moves than those above, which still might significantly improve our effectiveness in Iraq. It would be helpful to streamline the U.S. command structure. At the moment there are a bewildering variety of senior headquarters in Iraq: Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNFI, the four-star command in charge of overall strategy), Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNCI, the three-star command in charge of day-to-day operations), and Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTCI, the three-star command in charge of training and equipping Iraqi security forces). In addition, many of the functions performed by these military staffs (e.g., economic aid, legal affairs, contracting, public affairs, liaison with the Iraqi government) are also carried out by diplomats at the world's largest American embassy. And that's to say nothing of the parallel, often Byzantine structure of the Iraqi government.

The senior American leaders in Iraq today—General David Petraeus of MNFI, Lieutenant General Ray Odierno of MNCI, Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey of MNSTCI, and Ambassador Ryan Crocker—seem to be working fairly well together, but that wasn't always the case among their predecessors. And in any case, no matter how much goodwill there is at the top, the overlap between staffs can cause needless duplication and confusion. One recently returned army officer who served as an adviser to Iraqi troops complained to me that he was never sure who

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he was supposed to report to: Both MNSTCI and MNCI had jurisdiction over him.

A more serious problem is that rebuilding projects undertaken by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the State Department, the Army Corps of Engineers, and their assorted contractors have often not been well coordinated with the pacification efforts of American combat troops. That's why so many projects have turned into white elephants—they were built in areas that didn't have a modicum of security. This problem is starting to be addressed by the embedding of the State Department's Provincial Reconstruction Teams within U.S. brigades, but greater efforts should be made to streamline and rationalize operations so as to further the essential principle of unity of command.

An Iraqi version of CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support) might help here. This was the agency created in 1967 under the leadership of "Blowtorch Bob" Komer (with a young Richard Holbrooke as his aide-de-camp). A veteran of the CIA and the National Security Council, Komer coordinated all civilian pacification efforts in Vietnam. He and his successor, William Colby, reported to the four-star commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, thus tying civil and military efforts closely together.

As part of a broader administrative overhaul, it would make sense to put more emphasis on "information operations" and to push these efforts down to lower levels of command. There is widespread agreement within the U.S. military that the war for hearts and minds is essential, and that so far al Qaeda and other jihadist groups have done a more effective job than the United States of competing in the "information battlespace." They are able to get their messages out more quickly and to make a bigger splash. Part of this is due to the natural disparity between a ruthless foe that can lie with impunity and intimidate the press and a democratic government that must tell the truth and not interfere with the free functioning of the media. But part of the disparity is also due to self-inflicted wounds on the part of the U.S. government.

I was stunned to learn in Iraq that leaflets and radio broadcasts need to be approved at the division level, and that press releases need to be approved one step higher, at the corps level. Even more amazing was the revelation that U.S. forces are forbidden to conduct information operations on the Internet—the jihadists' favorite venue—because of concerns at the highest levels of the U.S. government that American propaganda might inadvertently be seen by U.S. citizens browsing the web. Several junior officers told me that they have the authority to call in an airstrike that will kill dozens of people but not the authority to issue a press release. That's crazy. The authority to conduct public affairs and information operations needs to be pushed down to the level of the battalion and even the company, and American commanders at those levels and above need to be graded on their success in engaging in this all-important battleground.

Accountability should extend far beyond information operations, of course. There needs to be a much greater effort to promote good commanders and weed out bad ones. Imagine how poorly the Union would have fared in the Civil War if Lincoln had not cashiered McClellan, Pope, Hooker, Burnside, and numerous other ineffectual generals, while promoting Sherman, Grant, and Sheridan. President Bush has singularly failed to hold his commanders accountable. Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling, a veteran of two combat tours in Iraq, rightly complains in the new issue of *Armed Forces Journal* that, "As matters stand now, a private who loses a rifle suffers far greater consequences than a general who loses a war." Yingling isn't the only one upset by this. I've talked to many serving soldiers who are still fuming over the Medals of Freedom given to General Tommy Franks, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, and CIA director George Tenet—well-intentioned men all, but their medals were seen as a reward for failure. There was also a fair amount of grumbling within the ranks when the previous commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, General George Casey, was appointed Army chief of staff notwithstanding the deteriorating security situation on his watch.

Failed commanders ought to be fired or pushed aside, following the example of Major General Lloyd Fredendall, who was relieved after the debacle at Kasserine Pass in 1943 and replaced by George S. Patton Jr. Equally important, those who prove their mettle on the battlefield should be quickly promoted. At the moment, battalion and brigade commanders—the key combat leaders in this decentralized war—cycle through Iraq on their 6-7 month (Marine) or 12-15 month (Army) tours, and then proceed with the normal course of their careers. The successful ones may eventually be rewarded with promotion over their less successful colleagues, but the process will take years to play out. Given that we're at war, it would make sense to modify the peacetime personnel system and to resurrect the 19th-century practice of giving brevet ranks or field promotions to outstanding officers who have proven their merit in combat.

Of course, we could achieve an acceptable outcome in Iraq even without taking some of these steps. Conversely, we could lose even if we implement all of these recommendations. But the more of them we implement, the easier the job will become—and the greater the likelihood of success. ♦

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Thomas of the Hardys

The poet-novelist of old England

BY BARTON SWAIM

Bettmann / Corbis

Thomas Hardy, ca. 1913

Thomas Hardy's father taught him to play the violin. Father and son played in the little string ensemble of the Stinsford parish church in Bockhampton—an experience Hardy would later use to write his first little masterpiece, *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Claire Tomalin concludes her biography of Hardy by reminding us that "he was a fiddler's son, with music in his blood and bone, who danced to his father's playing before he learnt to write." There is indeed something of music in all of Hardy's works. Even his best novels remind us of operas, relying as they frequently do on emotional intensity and incredible coincidences. Hardy loved to dance, and perhaps for that reason he possessed a remarkable ability to capture the peculiar movements of the human body: His women almost walk off the page.

Barton Swaim is writing a book on 19th-century Scottish literary critics.

The crispness and efficiency of Hardy's poetry, too, remind us of music; nearly every poem has its own melody. Here, for instance, are the first two stanzas of "The Going," one of many poems Hardy wrote after the death of his ill-treated wife in 1912.

Thomas Hardy
by Claire Tomalin
Penguin, 486 pp., $35

Thomas Hardy
The Guarded Life
by Ralph Pite
Yale, 522 pp., $35

Why did you give no hint that night
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
You would close your term here, up and be gone,
Where I could not follow
With wing of swallow
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

Never to bid good-bye
Or lip me the softest call,
Or utter a wish for a word, while I
Saw morning harden upon the wall,
Unmoved, unknowing
That your great going
Had place that moment, and altered all.

There are no superfluous words, just as great music has no empty gestures.

Hardy was born in 1840, the son of Thomas Hardy Sr., a stonemason. Tom was thought to have died at birth, but an alert midwife noticed him moving.

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He was a weak and sickly child, but precocious; he learned to read early, and his parents found ways to pay for a solid education at an Anglican school in nearby Dorchester. He tried to learn Greek for a time, and thought he might go up to Oxford, but this wasn't practical and he apprenticed with an architect, John Hicks, in Dorchester.

He was a talented draftsman, and eventually moved to London to work in a bigger firm. His architectural career flourished in London, and so did his intellect. He went to museums and the opera; he heard John Stuart Mill give a speech on Reform. But for reasons of his own he moved back to Dorset and went to work again for Hicks. He began to write, and it was at some point in 1867-68 that he realized, as all great writers do, that he was meant to be a writer and nothing else.

He wrote a novel with the unpromising title *The Poor Man and the Lady* and submitted it to the venerable firm of Alexander Macmillan. It was a full-throated attack on the upper class, and was turned down. Hardy would not be deterred, and eventually persuaded a second-tier firm to publish an imperfect but competent novel, *Desperate Remedies*. A year later he got the critics' attention with *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and in 1874 *Far from the Madding Crowd* was serialized in the prestigious *Cornhill Magazine*. In these latter two books Hardy first created the rural, organic worlds that would make his novels famous. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* the natural world itself comes alive, almost as though it, too, were a character. The famous storm scene contains some of the most stunning evocations of nature in English ("The moon vanished not to reappear. It was the farewell of the ambassador previous to war").

In 1874, his career at the beginning of a long upward arc, Hardy married Emma Gifford. Her parents felt their class superior to that of a stonemason's son, and never reconciled themselves to the marriage. It must have stung Hardy deeply, for as a writer of fiction he would become progressively more hostile to English society. And that hostility would only intensify as English society welcomed him into its highest ranks.

Throughout the 1870s and '80s, Hardy published a great deal of fiction, much of it what the critics call "uneven." Several of his books flopped, and deserved to flop. But he could write superb books, too, and his career and reputation were well served by the fact that his five best works spanned three decades: *Far from the Madding Crowd* was published in 1874, *The Return of the Native* in 1878, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in 1886, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in 1891, and *Jude the Obscure* in 1895.

Hardy had come from a poor family. He married up, and by the time he reached 40 he found himself at or near the top of London literary society. It can't be easy to keep oneself from excessive self-regard in such circumstances; anyhow, Hardy didn't, and nowhere is his behavior more unattractive than in his treatment of Emma. She had been well educated; she was bold and intelligent, and encouraged Hardy to abandon architecture for literature even before they were married, when the results might have been unfavorable for her. But her attitudes were naive, her conversation unimpressive to the sorts of people with whom Hardy wished to associate, and in time Hardy became embarrassed by her. In middle age he was still hankering after other women, none of whom were willing (unlike him) to break their marriage vows.

Although the Hardys' love endured for another two decades, it would die long before either of them did. In time Emma moved her bed to an attic room. Claire Tomalin begins her book at the moment of Emma's death, in her attic bed, when both Hardys were 72; for it was at this point that Thomas Hardy became a great poet. He had published poetry already, but something about the memory of his first wife, and the way she had slipped away without warning, drove Hardy to write some of the best poems in English—full of pain and tender regret, alive with sad, pulsating melodies. The most famous of these is "The Voice" (1912):

Woman much missed, how you call to me,
call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who
was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.
Can it be you that I hear? Let me view
you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the
town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I
knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan
wistlessness
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from
norward
And the woman calling.

Hardy must have known that he had always cared more about his work and reputation than about his childless wife. That is part of what makes the "Emma poems" so moving. But it's also what makes their author so difficult to like.

Hardy remarried. The much younger Florence Dugdale had insinuated herself into Hardy's life several years before Emma died. In a short time Florence, now married to an amiable and wealthy but much older and profoundly self-absorbed man, became as unhappy as the first Mrs. Hardy had been. All the poems about Emma were written and published in Florence's full view.

You might wonder whether we really need another biography of Hardy; there have been many, foremost among them that of the great Hardy scholar Michael Millgate. Ralph Pite's attention to Hardy's poetry and poetic methods deserves praise, but his book offers nothing genuinely new. Moreover, he commits the common biographer's error of assuming that his readers already know a great deal about his subject; rather than telling us what happened, who said what and when, he gets bogged down in his own

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multifaceted interpretations. Whereas Tomalin keeps up the pace of her narrative, it takes Pite almost 50 pages to get Hardy born. And I found it irritating that, while Pite draws heavily on Millgate's work, he only bothers to mention Millgate in order to disagree with him on some minor point or other.

Tomalin's is the better book. Yet both Tomalin and Pite leave virtually unexamined the one subject that would easily have justified another biography: Hardy's attitude—or rather attitudes, plural—to God. In his twenties Hardy was an evangelical; he argued about the merits of infant baptism with a friend at Hicks's architectural firm; he marked up his Bible; and was even part of a prayer group. He was a close friend of several generous and highly intelligent evangelicals, chiefly Horace Moule, son of the famous clergyman Henry Moule.

Hardy lost his faith at some point in the mid-1860s, living as a bachelor in London, and students have customarily treated the transition from belief to unbelief as though it were a simple matter of learning the truth, like a child's discovery that there is no tooth fairy. Hardy's work tends, for obvious reasons, to attract people who equate religious sentiments, and especially evangelical Christianity, with superstition and idiocy. Pite knows nothing about Victorian Christianity, referring at one point to evangelicalism as "a primitive form of Christianity—emotional in its appeal and intellectually repressive." Tomalin likewise assumes Hardy's imbecilic faith couldn't survive reading Mill's *On Liberty*, since Mill's attack on Christianity "was clearly reasoned and devastating."

On the subject of religion, Hardy's biographers have usually followed a predictable trajectory. They note his early evangelical faith, portray his loss of it as an inevitable turn of events, and then wonder why his novels' portrayal of traditional religion oscillates between hostility and sympathy, why he wrestles throughout his poetry with the God whom he had so decisively rejected, and why he attended church intermittently for much of his life. There's certainly more to all this than Pite's mushy psychologizing ("he wanted Christ's forgiveness—forgiveness in his case for abandoning faith in Christ") or Tomalin's facile use of the word "nostalgia" to explain all signs of Hardy's religious anxieties.

Everett Collection

Julie Christie, Terence Stamp in Far From the Madding Crowd *(1967)*

I'm no Hardy scholar, but it seems sufficiently plain that Hardy's attacks on the Christian church and the Christian God were meant, at least in part, to assuage the guilt he felt for abandoning Christianity in the 1860s. There's precious little in Hardy's notebooks and letters to suggest that he rejected Christianity for any specific reason; late in life he seems to have invented a story about hearing a clergyman castigate the working classes for aspiring to better themselves. One gets the feeling he didn't so much reject Christianity as simply drop it. He felt he simply couldn't remain a believer while also trying to impress the freethinking literary elite of London—an understandable decision, but not one likely to afford peace of mind. It's easy to suspect that's why Hardy's writing deals so frequently with regret over the loss of an earlier, truer self: "*I seem to be false to myself*," he says in "Wessex Heights," "*my simple self that was / And is not now*."

It's certainly true, in any case, that Hardy's strident antagonism toward the church—and by extension English society—strikes readers of his life as largely unaccountable. The Christian nation into which Hardy was born had not treated him shabbily; quite the opposite. His parents had been decent and loving. The people who had

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assisted Hardy most as a young man had been devoted and pious believers: Hicks, the architect; the Moule family; and above all the elderly clergyman and poet William Barnes, who had lent Hardy books and encouraged his intellectual curiosity.

Hardy didn't have to justify his loss of faith to anybody. But for some reason he felt he must, and he did it by pretending that the church had held him down. Thus, for instance, he ridiculed God as a coldhearted ignoramus in "God's Education," and made fools out of clergymen throughout much of his fiction. His enmity reached its height in *Jude the Obscure*, his last novel. Jude Fawley, clearly meant to represent some aspect of his creator, meets with cruelty and misfortune at every turn. Hardy was trying to suggest that he, too, had been thwarted and battered by Christian England—this from an author who enjoyed the company of nobility, the satisfactions of fame, and a massive income. The book has its power, of course, but its plot is as ridiculous as its message of despair is affected.

He was never the embattled atheist he sometimes pretended to be. Even as his fiction turned bleaker and, more frankly, irreligious, Hardy occasionally turned a sympathetic eye on the faith he had become notorious for scorning. Sometimes, as in "The Oxen," he says he wanted to believe; and sometimes it seems he did, as in "A Drizzling Easter Morning":

And he is risen? Well, be it so . . .
And still the pensive lands complain,
And dead men wait as long ago,
As if, much doubting, they would know
What they are ransomed from, before
They pass again their sheltering door.

Hardy died in 1928, in his 88th year, a great and celebrated writer. On Boxing Day 1927, a few days before he died, he asked his wife to read aloud Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. After she read it, he remarked that there was not a grain of evidence that the Gospel was true. Why he should have had the Bible read to him in the first place is a question Hardy's biographers have not yet answered. ♦

The Warsaw Concerto

Echoes of the classical past in modern Poland.

BY COLIN FLEMING

Political poets are rarely so elusive in their work as Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998), as devout an anti-Communist as Poland produced in its world of letters, and an artist believing the most potent manifestos come laden in symbols.

Maturing at a time when the arts in Poland were subject to government specifications, Herbert wrote his early verse while working a series of menial jobs, studying in Krakow's various underground schools, and eventually arriving on a global level in 1968 with a collection jointly edited by Czeslaw Milosz, whom Herbert would later rail against for what he considered Communist sympathies. Literary irony doesn't get much richer than when one notes that communism was to prove so central to Herbert's literary stock-in-trade that it's almost impossible to imagine what kind of poet he would have become without being able to rail against its vices.

The Collected Poems 1956-1998
by Zbigniew Herbert
Ecco, 624 pp., $34.95

For readers unfamiliar with Herbert's verse, traversing the poems in this collection can be a somewhat arduous process of disentanglement, of working out allusions, encoded meanings, and some of the most fiery protests—couched in inspirational verse—to be found in 20th-century Eastern literature.

In "Apollo and Marsyas," probably Herbert's strongest claim to a canonical work, torture at the level of the individual (albeit of the Greek satyr variety) becomes metaphor for an entire culture coming undone, for no need, save the ego of the tormentor:

bald mountains of liver
white ravines of aliment
rustling forests of lung
sweet hillocks of muscle
joints bile blood and shudders
the wintry wind of bone
over the salt of memory
shaken by a shudder of disgust
Apollo is cleaning his instrument

A weapon being cleaned—not so much in disgust over an act as in the messy result of having so thoroughly eviscerated one's quarry (in the most unnatural of environments). A ghastly nonchalance, to Herbert's thinking, obscuring what ought to have been the central issue—murder, in Apollo's case; communism, in Poland's.

Herbert relished his mythological references, and his poems are full of all manner of literary material. Anyone and anything can be appropriated from the ancient texts and pressed into service as foil to Poland's shackled state: Thor with his hammer, or Hector with his courage, come calling in the name of more enlightened government, or sometimes stripped of their core attributes because of a parallel oppression.

Still, for all of the consistent political themes (communism as yolk of a people, communism as anathema to art) that were central to Herbert's work over his 50 years of composition, his late 1990s poems summon all of the attendant moods and imagery of the deathbed, political railings still intact. His range was impressive. Housing nine complete volumes of poetry, *The Collected Poems* posits Herbert less as formal creator and more as

Colin Fleming, who writes for Art in America, *is finishing a novel.*

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an author assuming narrative guises that were often a long way from the man himself, and yet entirely indicative of the artist who ultimately made the man.

Chord of Light (1956) introduces Herbert's strange superimpositions, in which images typical of the charnel house are crossed with the language of the factory, a ghastly mix of mass production and funerary gore. Elsewhere, the reader is dumped into an earthly hell of scorching deserts and rotting adobe walls, the stench of befouled blood going up over the cattle trail. Given Herbert's realist touches, we might as well be in the unsettled, ungoverned territory of the 19th-century American West rather than some Greco-Roman arena—which is more often the case—where the minotaur hunts for prey, as Apollo looks on.

Not that Herbert wasn't fond of wit and whimsy, especially when laughter, through the contrast of mirth and pain, reveals suffering's depths. In his fifth collection of poems, we're introduced to Mr. Cogito—an easy pun, but suggestive of a second self, all the same—who gets up to all sorts of shenanigans and discovers, in his daily encounters, a world where nostalgia, progress, and demagogues constantly clash and the man of conscience laughs, if not best, at least most knowingly. Hardly *Buster Keaton Goes to Warsaw*, but a nuanced absurdism all the same, tempered by thoughts of a beloved homeland held—spiritually, culturally, aesthetically—in irons. And so Herbert traveled, living in Germany and Paris and teaching for a spell in Los Angeles as he settled into the final phase of his life as poetical emissary. Spending his final years back in Poland, he mastered the cool, improbable art of juxtaposed extremes, producing a kind of transcendent accordance.

"Oh how sublime the peace of a fatal blow," he wrote in a series of elegies—at once a truism, terror, call to repose, maxim, and public shaming of a government whose people Herbert sought to render as no less than modern tragedians, oppressed by the fates. ♦

Brains Distrust

A man of the left who is really, really mad.

BY EDWARD SHORT

Readers familiar with *The London Review of Books* will be familiar with its frequent contributor Stefan Collini. Prolix, venomous, and impeccably left-liberal, he is also professor of intellectual history and English literature at Cambridge.

Absent Minds
Intellectuals in Britain
by Stefan Collini
Oxford, 536 pp., $45

His new book is not for everyone. Those who have never envied the French their intellectuals will find much about it that is baffling. Collini refers to what he calls "Dreyfus envy" to describe what left-liberal British intellectuals feel for their much more highly regarded French counterparts—though he ignores the respective intellectual histories of the two countries that might explain such envy. Still, for all its shortsightedness, *Absent Minds* will usefully inform anyone curious about what makes the left-liberal tick. In his portraits of T.S. Eliot, A.J.P. Taylor, A.J. Ayer, and George Orwell, Collini shows how they either abdicated what he believes ought to have been their proper roles as intellectuals or exercised their intellectual authority in ways he disapproves.

The least original of the essays is on Eliot who, over the years, has come in for a good deal of wigging. The Pope of Russell Square is now guilty of nearly every enormity: He was an anti-Semite, a misogynist, an elitist, a fascist. He was culpable of fostering what William Empson called "malign neo-Christianity." He had a good word for the royalist Charles Maurras. He drove his first wife mad and then had her put away. For the doctrinaire professoriate that has turned our English departments into factories of dreary left-liberal cliché, he has become the prize whipping boy. Rather than question any of this, Collini merely eggs on the flagellants.

What damns Eliot most in Collini's eyes is that he advocated an intelligentsia that would be made up not of socialists but of conservatives. For Collini, this makes Eliot one of the many deviant intellectuals who may have started out on the proper path of antiestablishment dissent but who, eventually, retreated into a kind of fascist conservatism. (Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, and Paul Johnson were also guilty of this unforgivable tergiversation.) What Collini does not realize is that the author of "The Waste Land" (1922) and *The Sacred Wood* (1920) was every bit as conservative as the writer of *Four Quartets* (1944) and *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939).

Frank Kermode makes the same mistake with respect to Evelyn Waugh, arguing that the novelist of *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *Vile Bodies* (1930) had little in common with the conservative Roman Catholic who wrote the *Sword of Honour* (1961) trilogy. Douglas Lane Patey convincingly argues otherwise in his brilliant critical life of Waugh.

If T.S. Eliot's career proved anything, it was that a poet and critic could have a profound influence on the intellectual life of his times simply by being a good poet and critic—despite meddling in politics. What was it Yeats said?

He has had enough of meddling who can please
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
Or an old man upon a winter's night.

Edward Short's forthcoming book on John Henry Newman and his contemporaries will be published by Continuum.

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You need only think of the number of first-rate poets who finally found their voices after tiring of imitating Eliot's. W.H. Auden and Hart Crane come most readily to mind, but there were others. Or of the immense creative influence of his essays, which affirmed that literary criticism is, indeed, "a distinctive activity of the civilized mind." It is odd that Collini should want to deny that influence. So many of the critics of whom he approves—I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, Empson, Kermode—came into their own by learning from Eliot.

In his essays on the historian Taylor and the philosopher Ayer, Collini describes the careers of two men who had all the necessary attributes of the left-liberal intellectual—Atheism, contempt for capitalism, membership in the Labour party, press savvy, readiness to reach a large, miscellaneous, popular audience—but who had nothing to say. Taylor refused to concede that history had any political lessons to offer, and Ayer refused to concede that anyone could know anything about anything.

Taylor was a much better historian than Collini allows. It is true that he often advanced madcap theses, but even in his errors there were elements of truth. In this regard, he is reminiscent of Edward Gibbon, whom we read despite his conclusions. And in any case, bad ideas do not mar Taylor's best works, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* (1954) and *English History 1914-1945* (1965). What Collini dislikes about Taylor is that he was not prepared to be consistently left-liberal. He had good things to say about Churchill and bad things to say about the Soviets. He was too contrarian. Collini wants his left-liberals marching in lockstep, which is why he has taken to upbraiding Christopher Hitchens, another lively contrarian.

Collini's reading of Freddie Ayer shows his humorlessness. The fun-loving, frivolous Ayer clearly offends the puritan in Collini. Throughout his discussion of Ayer there is a kind of censorious disapproval: How could a man who might have been such an effective publicist for positivist atheism have condescended to appear on silly television programs like *The Brains Trust*? Worse, how could he have admitted that he had nothing of any substance to say to his fellow citizens? For Collini, these are exasperating shortcomings.

Picture Post / Getty Images / George Douglas

A.J. Ayer, 1952

But surely, the one admirable thing about Ayer was his honesty. More than any of his converts—Paul Johnson once referred to "the new welfare state intellectuals . . . with their long-playing records and their ponytailed wives, their bottles of Spanish wine and volumes of A.J. Ayer"—he freely acknowledged the philosophical blind alley of logical positivism. Asked in the 1970s what he thought the defects were of *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), his famous attack on metaphysics, he replied: "Well, I suppose the most important defect was that nearly all of it was false." The truest thing about Ayer was his hedonism. His second, American, wife once said of his indefatigable philandering: "Some men played golf; Freddy played women." It is also worth remarking that he was no duffer on the dance floor, by all accounts particularly good at the samba.

What responsible public role Ayer might have played is not clear. He was convinced that moral judgments were mere feelings, indicative not of principles but emotions. Consequently, there was no such thing as objective good or evil but only one's feelings about what was morally good or evil, which could claim no verifiable truth. It is strange imagining him trying to interest his dance partners in such notions.

The worst essay in the book is on George Orwell. For Collini, Orwell was the most reprehensible of traitorous clerks because he was "guilty of that most unlovely and least defensible of all inner contradictions, the anti-intellectualism of the intellectual." What this boils down to is that Orwell, unlike, say, Eric Hobsbawm, refused to connive at Stalin's genocidal crimes. *Anti-intellectualism* in Collini's lexicon means *anti-left intellectualism*.

Some of the comments Orwell made about English left intellectuals during WWII have an unsettling application to our own left intellectuals: "The quickest way of ending a war," he observed, "is to lose it, and if one finds the prospect of a long war intolerable, it is natural to disbelieve in the possibility of victory." In one of his London Letters for *Partisan Review*, he wrote: "The chief activity among left-wing writers is a rather pettifogging criticism which turns into a kind of dismay when England wins a victory, because this always falsifies their predictions." There is no need to belabor parallels.

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Collini's essay can be read as a riposte to Hitchens's recent paean to Orwell. You can detect the abomination of dissent that characterizes so much of the left-liberal camp, and on this subject, Paul Johnson is astute: "Taken as a group, [left-liberal intellectuals] are often ultra-conformist within the circles formed by those whose approval they seek and value." Yet left-liberals were not always like this. Take William Hazlitt. Speaking of Edmund Burke in 1826, he assured his readers, "I had reason for my prejudice in favour of this author. To understand an adversary is some praise. . . . I conceived that [Burke] might be wrong in his main argument, and yet deliver fifty truths in arriving at a false conclusion." Collini would be no more capable of that kind of intellectual magnanimity than he would be of putting in a good word for global capital. In the 500-odd pages of *Absent Minds*, there are two passing references to Burke.

Although Orwell played a public role as an intellectual, he seems to have been happiest in the role of private writer interested in public affairs, but only insofar as this could help him to become a better writer. A reader of *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) can see that what preoccupied Orwell was not the plight of England's unemployed but the making of a good book. Victor Gollancz, the publisher who commissioned what he hoped would be a conventional piece of left-liberal sociology, was appalled to see Orwell using the poor for comic effect. But Orwell had no interest in writing an advertisement for Gollancz's Left Book Club: The point of *Wigan* is its honest portrayal of class. For Orwell, the English were beastly to the poor because they didn't like the way they smelled, they didn't like their table manners.

> I have known numbers of bourgeois Socialists. I have listened by the hour to their tirades against their own class, and yet never, not even once, have I met one who had picked up proletarian table-manners. Yet after all why not? Why should a man who thinks all virtue resides in the proletariat still take such pains to drink his soup silently? It can only be because in his heart he feels that proletarian manners are disgusting.

For Stefan Collini and his friends, such an admission would be inconceivable. And after reading about the intellectuals who fail to meet with his approval, it is amusing to learn that the person who comes closest to his ideal is . . . Edward Said, the Columbia English professor who made such a lucrative career out of misrepresenting his Palestinian connections and charging more distinguished colleagues with bigotry and imposture. Mendacious, fraudulent, bumptious, Said is a strange figure to embrace to argue the utility of intellectuals. But then Collini's ideal intellectual would not be held to any rigorous standard. He would have to be prepared to "speak truth to power" (Collini actually employs this phrase) and bemoan "global capitalism's relentless search for profits" and publicize "the need to articulate and help make effective some alternative vocabulary of evaluation to that spawned by the 'bottom-line rationalism' of international corporations." And when not unburdening himself of these animadversions, he would be signing petitions and attending conferences—a kind of English Jean-Paul Sartre.

No wonder the English continue to look askance at the very notion of an intellectual. ♦

Give Them a Sword

Sir David meets King Richard in the Interview of the Century. **BY ROBERT ZELNICK**

With *Frost/Nixon*, Peter Morgan confirms his place as the multimedia master of a strange but engaging genre of fiction. The writer behind such award-season heavyweights as *The Queen* and *The Last King of Scotland*—both of which garnered dual Oscar and Golden Globe wins for their respective leading actors—Morgan now tries his hand at a piece of Americana: the Richard Nixon-David Frost interviews of 1977. The play, which opened on Broadway late last month, is a compelling bit of theater. As a work of historical fiction, however, it shows too little allegiance to the facts that inspired it.

Morgan approaches the sessions as a kind of boxing match between two unequal opponents. In one corner, the disgraced though heavily favored former president, buttressed by his chief of staff Col. Jack Brennan and his agent "Swifty" Lazar. In the other corner, British talk-show host David Frost, depicted here as something of a dandy, and his team of researchers. Morgan uses Frost researcher James Reston (Stephen Kunken) and Brennan (Corey Johnson) as narrators, setting the scenes and underlining with commentary the points he wishes to make.

Frost's character is played by Michael Sheen, who has twice done Tony Blair in highly praised interpretations of Morgan's work. Here the collaboration has Frost anguishing over his cancelled American and Australian weekly gigs, and the resulting snub by Sardi's—long a hangout of Broadway celebrities—depriving him of his favorite table. Morgan's Frost is a cheeky playboy, all style and no substance, whose interest in the interviews stems more from ego than intellect.

In contrast, Morgan's Nixon,

Robert Zelnick, professor of journalism at Boston University and a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, served as executive editor of the original Nixon/Frost interviews.

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brought to life by the fine actor Frank Langella, is a lumbering caricature of a man bent and constricted by the weight of personal tragedy. His shoulders sink toward the stage, his "victory" wave is stiff and exaggerated. Under pressure from Frost, the face of Langella's Nixon freezes in an eerie smile, then dissolves into soft clay while a film of saliva glistens on his lower lip. His tortured mien—captured on a wall of TV screens—is a study in humiliation.

So thoroughly does Langella capture the internal life of Richard Nixon that I found myself recalling one point in the original interviews when a damning series of Frost citations of White House transcripts made Nixon's eyelids flutter like the wings of a moth shot through with electric current. Langella does not mimic this Nixon; the physical resemblance between the two is not striking. Instead, Langella finds the essence of the Nixon character and pours it into a physical form which one accepts as Richard Nixon. Even with the final curtain barely down, I had some trouble distinguishing which of my most memorable images of Nixon were those from our sessions 30 years ago versus the creature created by Langella.

In both the real-life interviews and on stage, Frost struggled in his early bouts with Nixon, losing points to long-winded answers and maudlin recollections. But when it came time for Watergate, the underdog came out swinging, piling up points against a Richard Nixon who became more combative and less credible with each blow struck. Did he not join a conspiracy to obstruct justice by ordering aides to approach the CIA about pulling the FBI off the case? No, says Nixon, misstating the law—not if his motive was to keep other embarrassing activities from coming to light.

In the 1977 interviews, Frost pounded this theme for a few minutes and then moved on to other areas of presidential culpability, including the payment of money designed to buy the silence of the Watergate defendants. But in Peter Morgan's re-creation of the confrontation, Nixon offers an additional argument.

> *Nixon*: When you're in office, you have to do a lot of things that are not, in the strictest sense of the law, legal. But you do them because they're in the greater interests of the nation.
>
> *Frost*: . . . Are you really saying that there are certain situations where the president can decide whether it's in the best interests of the nation and do something illegal?
>
> *Nixon*: I'm saying that when the president does it, that means it's not illegal.

That response draws a sharp, prolonged laugh from audiences at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre on West 45th Street. But in fact, Nixon's assertion of inherent presidential power came not in response to questions about Watergate but three sessions later, when the two were discussing the so-called "second story jobs" briefly authorized by Nixon as part of the Houston Plan to combat attacks on police, banks, campus ROTC facilities, and other targets by groups embracing political violence. Morgan apparently concluded that, transferring Nixon's claim from an area where there was some historical precedent to an area where there was none, would better establish the character of the man he was describing and the underlying political issues as well.

Between sessions, the Frost staff is shown strategizing, bickering, prodding their man to play it hard, not to get pushed around. The Nixon staff—Ken Khachigian, Frank Gannon, and Diane Sawyer (yes, *that* Diane Sawyer)—is mentioned by name but never shown. That is unfortunate because they, along with speechwriter Ray Price, played a critical role in persuading Nixon that, in order to begin the long climb toward his coveted elder statesman status, he would have to acknowledge his role in the Watergate coverup and apologize to the American people. Morgan not only ignores this community of interest between the two camps but also distorts Jack Brennan's role at a critical moment of the proceedings.

It came as Frost had taken a defensive, nit-picking Nixon and, with skillful questioning, brought him close to accepting responsibility for the Watergate disaster: "I gave them a sword," Nixon acknowledged, "and they stuck it in, and they twisted it with relish, and if I had been in their position I'd have done the same thing." But as Frost remained aggressive, Nixon once more became nit-picky and uncooperative.

Now Morgan has Brennan burst onto the interview set, forcing the startled Frost to take an unscheduled break to "change tape" and allowing Nixon time to confer with Brennan and other aides. The help, however, comes too late. Nixon, according to the narrator, was already like the bull who had "lost the fight, and by implication, the will to live." Within moments he would acknowledge his participation in the Watergate coverup, and apologize to the American people for having let the country down. The event was stamped on Nixon's face, "swollen and ravaged by loneliness, self-loathing, and defeat—filling every television screen in the country."

The truth is that Brennan never burst onto the set to stop the interrogation. Instead, he began waving an improvised little placard in Frost's line of vision reading LET HIM TALK. Mistaking the words as LET US TALK Frost called a short halt to the proceedings.

The delay, occasioned by Brennan's effort to get Frost to back off, allowing Nixon time to complete his apologia, wound up working because it gave the Nixon staff time to implore Nixon to go further than he had and for Brennan to urge Frost to be empathetic. The result was one of the most gripping moments in the history of television news, as Nixon finally conceded that he had participated in the coverup and had offered statements from the White House that were, at times, not true.

Yes, said Nixon, "I let the American people down. And I'll have to carry that burden the rest of my life." The pain was stamped on Nixon's face, as Morgan's narrator describes. But the Nixon staff had intervened to help

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Time & Life Pictures / John Bryson

David Frost, Richard Nixon, New Year's Day 1977

make it happen rather than to block Frost's effort for a full accounting.

Morgan tampers with dates and facts for what appear to be marginal returns. Early in our research, some eight months prior to the interviews, my colleague Jim Reston discovered three previously secret tape transcripts, including a June 20, 1972 meeting between Nixon and his White House political aide, Charles Colson, in which the president describes Howard Hunt and his Cuban Watergate colleagues as "pretty hard-line guys" and says the plan should be "to leave this where it is, with the Cubans"—adding, "At times, I just stonewall it."

A reasonable interpretation of the tape is that it shows Nixon bestowing his blessing on the coverup three days prior to the "smoking gun" conversation with H.R. Haldeman, in which he seeks to have the CIA block the FBI probe. But it most emphatically does *not* do what Morgan has Frost claim in the fictional play: "You have always maintained that you first learned of the break-in on June the 23rd. This tape clearly shows that to be a falsehood." In fact, Nixon always acknowledged learning of the break-in within hours of its June 17 occurrence while returning with Haldeman from a visit to Key Biscayne. That claim was undisturbed by the new evidence and remains unchallenged to this day.

Further adding to the confusion, in Morgan's fictionalized version of events, the playwright has Reston discovering the new transcripts over Easter, just days before the "last" session on Watergate is scheduled to tape. (In reality, three additional sessions followed the Watergate sessions.) Hovering on the brink of failure, with no relief in sight, Frost is saved by the material, and at the end of the show seems less like a man who rose to meet a challenge than a guy who caught a lucky break.

Having worked with David Frost on the initial interviews, plus two mildly profitable writing ventures over the years, my (perhaps biased) view is that he is easily underestimated—and was certainly underestimated by Richard Nixon. Yes, he could be more selective in his choice of interview subjects; and yes, I was disappointed when, after his long-running Sunday morning interview program was dropped by the BBC, he jumped lovingly into the waiting arms of Al Jazeera. But I have also found him to be well-informed, a voracious reader, a fine writer and editor with a bear-trap memory of past events and conversations. And though charm may have been his weapon of choice in 1977, he was already a skilled interviewer who understood the give-and-take of probing dialogue. Over the years he would report first-hand on mass murder in Bangladesh, starvation in Africa, and the conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East.

The confession from Nixon—this moment of truth amidst so much subterfuge—was hard fought and hard won. To write Frost out of it is to rewrite history.

Still, Morgan puts the two characters on stunning display, and at times his inventions do elevate not only the drama, but also our understanding of both men. One particularly ingenious creation is a scene where a mildly intoxicated Nixon telephones Frost on the night before their fateful Watergate encounter to lament the inability of either man, despite lives of accomplish-

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ment, to win the respect of "them."

And who are "they"? "The smart-asses at college. The high-ups. The well-born," says Nixon. Now they are both down, both seeking the limelight again, brothers under the skin. But, as Frost chirps in, participants in a game only one can win. For the Frost presented by Morgan, the solution to all the world's problems is to have a good day at the office. But to Morgan's Nixon, one's past has already determined one's future, and there is nothing left but hatred, bitterness, hopelessness, self-loathing, rage, and despair, a corruption of the soul so deep as to be beyond redemption.

With Frost having bounced back from some early misadventures to score a decisive triumph, Morgan offers a final political judgment through the lips of Reston: "Despite being buried with full honors in 1994, Richard Nixon never again held public office of any kind, nor achieved the rehabilitation he so desperately craved. Today his name continues to be synonymous with corruption and disgrace, and his most lasting legacy is that any political wrongdoing is immediately given the suffix 'gate.'"

Few political observers in this country would think that assessment tells anywhere near the whole story. Rather, the Frost/Nixon interviews proved cathartic, providing Richard Nixon with the opportunity to acknowledge his role in the Watergate coverup and confess that he had betrayed the trust of the nation. It also gave Americans the opportunity to see him pained, contrite, and unthreatening.

True enough, Nixon never again held public office—hardly a novelty in a nonparliamentary system. But he soon returned from his place of exile in San Clemente and took up residence in the politically brisk environment of New York. Invitations to his dinner parties were cherished. Over a period of 16 years he wrote nine bestsellers, most dealing with profound questions of national security. He spoke to appreciative audiences. His appearances on the prestige network interview programs became routine. He traveled to more than 30 foreign countries. A highly regarded national security think tank in Washington bears his name. His political advice was publicly sought by the likes of Ronald Reagan, Ross Perot, and Bob Dole. His insights on Russia and China were received over lunch at the White House by President George H.W. Bush and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft.

Yes, the term "-gate" is affixed to many a Washington scandal, but often with the help of the Nixonites themselves, a not-entirely-convincing way of treating all executive branch misconduct as no worse than Watergate. Nixon's striking return to public grace eventually encouraged political analysts and scholars to take a fresh look at his presidency—in particular, his moderation on race, his effort to achieve "peace with honor" in Vietnam, the opening to China, and his vital role in converting the South into secure Republican terrain while putting into play white Northern ethnic voters, long a bastion of Democratic strength.

Obstruction of justice and abuse of power still mar the Nixon name and record. But they are far from his complete legacy. ♦

French Without Tears

Veber's latest farce is fast, furious, and funny.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Francis Veber turns 70 this year, but he's one of the youngest moviemakers in the world. Veber is a Frenchman who has been writing and directing dizzy, fizzy farces for 35 years—ever since the title character in *The Tall Blond Man with One Black Shoe* wandered cluelessly through a hornet's nest of spies without ever learning that intelligence agencies around the world had mistaken him for the world's greatest secret agent.

The Valet
Directed by Francis Veber

That movie was remade with a young Tom Hanks in the lead in 1985. It was the second of seven Veber films to be adapted by Hollywood, and the best you can say about it was that it was a little bit better than the first: *The Toy*, based on his *Le Jouet*, an absolutely horrible film featuring the made-in-hell pairing of Jackie Gleason and Richard Pryor. Hollywood has proved no kinder to Veber in the years since. His *Les Compères* became the dreadful *Father's Day* with Robin Williams and Billy Crystal. *Fugitifs* was translated into the nightmarish *Three Fugitives* with Martin Short and Nick Nolte.

Veber's lone writing and directing effort in English was *My Father the Hero*, the tale of a divorced father who poses as his own teenage daughter's girlfriend. Maybe this deeply uncomfortable Oedipal joke would have worked in French—where they are, you know, cosmopolitan about these sexual matters. But in English? Cringe-inducing.

Only the outrageous *La Cage Aux Folles* managed to survive its Americanization into *The Birdcage*, with Miami substituting for Cap d'Antibes and Nathan Lane mincing memorably in the part of the drag queen who tries to pose as a real woman to provide his adopted son with a mother to show to his future in-laws at a dinner party

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Sony Classics

Daniel Auteuil and Kristin Scott Thomas in The Valet

where everything goes delightfully wrong.

If you've seen any of the American Veber movies (with the exception of *The Birdcage*) you will perhaps doubt my word when I tell you that he is a master—the world's most consistently excellent comedy director. But he is.

The seemingly foolproof comic construction of Veber's best work is what has attracted Hollywood time and again. But nobody in America seems capable of replicating the unpretentious yet masterly speed with which Veber unfurls his intricate tales. His movies are so breezy they almost seem to be improvised, and yet they function as smoothly as a Swiss watch. There's no exposition, no character development. He plunges us straight into the middle of his story and lets us discover who the characters are and what makes them tick as his movies hurtle along to their breakneck conclusions. He tugs at our heartstrings for maybe 30 seconds every half-hour or so.

In Hollywood, of course, the heartstring-tugging goes on for minutes at a time, just so we can watch Robin Williams and Jackie Gleason turn all gooey and lovable. Such scenes destroy Veber's farces by drenching their crispness in phony tears and making everything soggy.

Even now, Hollywood hacks are picking and scratching at Veber's latest film, *The Valet* (just released here) in hopes of converting it into a vehicle for some lovable American. In *The Valet*, a billionaire industrialist is caught by a paparazzo arguing with his supermodel girlfriend on a Paris street just as our hero, a lowly valet parker at a restaurant near the Eiffel Tower, is walking by. The billionaire fears that his wife will divorce him, because most of his company's stock is in her name. And so the valet parker, who appears in the paparazzo's photograph, is paid off to act as though he is the supermodel's boyfriend.

All this happens in the first seven minutes of *The Valet*, which should give you an idea of how efficiently Veber works. And there's lots more plot to come. The twists and turns are entirely and happily unexpected, and the whole thing is over in 85 minutes.

This may be the one Veber movie that might make it in English, because there's nothing especially Gallic about it. Turn the billionaire into a Donald Trump without a prenup, set it in Los Angeles instead of Paris, and everything else could remain exactly the same. Still, they'll blow it. They always have and they always will.

Fortunately, no one has figured out how to crack the problem of turning Veber's undisputed masterpiece, *The Dinner Game* (1998), into a Hollywood feature. Where else but in France would you be able to make a movie about a bunch of self-infatuated intellectuals who have a club devoted to humiliating people they deem stupid? Every month one of these intellectuals finds a hobby-obsessed moron, seduces him into thinking he's brilliant and fascinating, and brings the moron to dinner so that everyone can make relentless fun of him. They get their just deserts at the unknowing hands of the dumbest, most ridiculous moron ever to be invited.

The Dinner Game is one of the few movies to which I would affix the word "perfect." There isn't a moment that should be cut, a line that should be edited, a performance that could be improved. It's not the funniest movie ever made, though it's hilarious. There's nothing remotely significant or meaningful about it, though one is tempted to celebrate it because of the way it pricks the balloon of French self-regard. But it is perfect. Which is why you should put *The Dinner Game* in your Netflix queue right this second.

As for *The Valet*, if it's playing anywhere near you, find a way to see it. It will make you feel better about France for a minute, the way Sarkozy's election did. ♦

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Parody

"WANTED: A NEW TRUMAN

DOES ANYBODY IN THE 2008 FIELD HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?"

—Newsweek, *May 14, 2007*

FORMER PRESIDENT TRUMAN DECLARES CANDIDACY FOR '08

'I'm in this thing to win, and don't you forget it'

BY HARRY F. ROSENTHAL

INDEPENDENCE, Mo., May 21—In a gesture nearly unprecedented in American history, former President Harry S. Truman announced today that he intends to seek the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination.

"I'm damn sick and tired of reading in the newspapers about how the Democrats need another Truman," the 123-year-old ex-president told reporters at a crowded press conference in the front parlor of his Victorian home on Delaware Avenue.

Gesturing toward his wife, former First Lady Bess Truman, who sat on a nearby sofa, Truman explained, "The Boss and I were talking over supper the other night. 'If they're looking for the next Truman,' she told me, 'what's wrong with the original?' Well, I finished my glass of buttermilk, and said, 'By golly, you're right!'"

By entering the race for the Democratic nomination some 54 years after leaving the White House, Truman becomes the third former president in U.S. history to seek reelection. (In 1912, Theodore Roosevelt sought a third term against the incumbent William Howard Taft, and in 1892, Grover Cleveland reclaimed the White House from Benjamin Harrison.)

Truman, whose health has been a matter of speculation since his annual checkup last November at Memorial Hospital in nearby Kansas City, brushed aside concerns that he might be too old or too long out of politics to run for office in the Internet Age.

"I'm fit as a fiddle," he said. "I've been poked and prodded like a prize pig, and if you want to know what the medical boys think, just point your browsers to www.giveemhell08.com and read the results."

In a series of informal statements, Truman outlined positions on the Iraq war ("Hell, we lost nearly 34,000 in Korea"), the economy ("When the railway workers struck for a month in 1946, I was ready to draft 'em into the Army"), and Iran's nuclear program ("Ask Hirohito if I would use atomic weapons").

When asked about civil liberties and the War on Terror, the former president reminded reporters that, early in the Cold War, he had established loyalty boards to investigate espionage in the federal government. "We looked into about 20,000 cases," said Truman, "and 2,000 of those people resigned, and we fired another 400, including a lot of homosexuals and fellow travelers."

Truman's famous temper flared only once, when the subject of his embattled attorney general, J. Howard McGrath, was raised. "I'm not gonna stand here and deny that there wasn't corruption," he said, his voice rising. "But Howard's been dead now for

(See 123-YEAR-OLD MAN, p. A5)

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